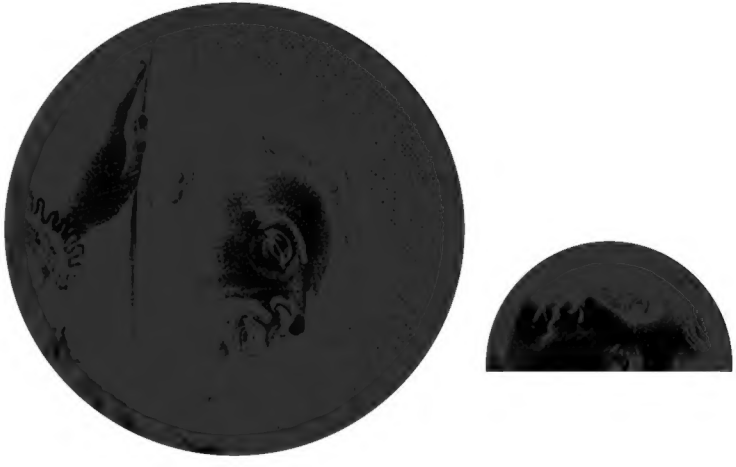
Aaron Barry

Femoid



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This is the free digital version of *Femoid.* This book *may* be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher. (Basically, go crazy. Spread the word. Just don't pretend to be me or whatever.)

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"The male chromosome is an incomplete female chromosome. In other words, the male is a walking abortion; aborted at the gene stage. To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples."

—Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*

"These bearers of the oppressive instincts that thirst for reprisal, the descendants of every kind of European and non-European slavery, and especially of the entire pre-Aryan populace—they represent the *regression* of mankind!"

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

"So much more complex is the man who suffers from limitless anxiety. The wise man's life is empty and sterile, for it is free from contradiction and despair. An existence full of irreconcilable contradictions is so much richer and creative."

—Emil Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*

"I just hope my death makes more cents than my life."

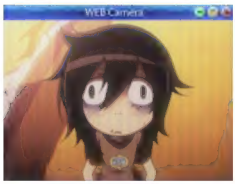
—Arthur Fleck, *Joker* (2019)

H. M.
—The dead-self

This narrative features heavy ADHD influences. For the "normie" experience, read without the parentheticals or footnotes. For the true *Femoid* experience, read with.

Any typographical errors contained herein are meant to reflect a realistic range of styles and communication methods necessary to the story. As well, the more graphic or contentious subject matter of this book has been included in the spirit of accurately reflecting the rarefied, painful, ironic, neurotic, and dire perspectives of the characters and archetypes these perspectives may stem from.

What does it mean to you? Anonymous 4 hours
252452 >>252455 >>252475 >>252499 >>252512 >>252513



I wanna know what being a femoid/femcel/ feeeemale means to you. I've been lurking for a few weeks now, been an unfuckable outcast for most of my life. What is the essential experience?

Anonymous 4 hours 252454

I want someone to love me I want someone to love me Fuck me Fcuk me why won't anyone touch me

Anonymous 4 hours 252455

>>254352
imo, here's how it breaks down:
>femcel: a girl or woman who is involuntarily celibate; maybe full khv.
>femoid: voluntarily celibate; might be able to have sex under right circumstances
>feeeemale: failed normie; probably stealth normie; likely to fake being femcel for attention.

Anonymous 4 hours 252458 >>252462 >>252467 >>252492

a raging unabated interminable (cum)dumpster fire set to wagner's ring cycle or the cocomelon theme song (depends on the day). awarning an encapsulation a rheum signed adhd soaked affadavit that a girl's life can be when left to grow in accordance with a yawning jaundiced zeitgeist something like a few crinkles of legalese the opulescent phlegm of a poisoned generation an irritating diabolic sublime advent.

Anonymous 4 hours 252462

>>252458 (You)
Holy shit nona lol

Anonymous 3 hours 252466

Hating all moids. Period.

Anonymous 3 hours 252467

>>252458 (You)
jej go off

Anonymous 3 hours 252475

I have a theory that on a fundamental, supra-physiological level, the "femcel" lifestyle has its roots in heteronormative structures of domination. I've been working on a treatise (I'll probably publish it online because moids dominate academia and refuse to acknowledge the contributions of women) that expounds upon the fundamental inequality femcels and femoids/foids face. Butler theorized that ----------

I

1
My Lifetime of Rest and Retardation

"Look on my Twerks, ye Mighty, and despair!"
—Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"

The woman on the "lifestyle" livestream, whom we affectionately refer to as "qt3.15," is posing in FENDI lingerie, in a $700 gamer chair. The chat's lapping it up. A few users are probably cranking their hoggs. Her complexion reminds me of curdled milk, much as I hate that common description, but I've been overdosing on organic whole milk these days (despite being lactose intolerant)—the kind that comes in the fancy glass bottles and costs $3.00 more per litre—so this doesn't *wholly* displease me.

She's bent over the chair (X-Star Gaming brand), long tresses of fake blond draped over one shoulder. She's just written "FUCK ME, SENPAI" in black Sharpie on her ass. This sparks a flood of comments, from the typical *finna bust* 😩 to the more rarified *show feet next* 😳. One user wants to pay her for her generosity—another for additional services, should she be in his area ("L O N D O N").

I believe I'm the only one to notice the head of her infant son, James, in the background, whom she had with YouTuber ZManus.

I used to enjoy qt's content. When she started out, she would do "schizo girl" video game playthroughs (horror titles like *Silent Hill 2* from her "wiccan temple," [her then-dumpy downtown Chicago apartment]) and hold comfy hangout sessions where she'd answer chat questions, share tips on how to do "big titty goth gf" makeup styles, tell stories from her bartending job at a seedy hole-in-the-wall joint. In fact, I owe part of my current look to her—the septum piercing, the choker I sometimes wear.[1] We even had our own version of the "spooky scary skeletons" meme—"spookid"—which we'd spam whenever we knew something frightening was coming or whenever something silly happened.

Now her streams largely center around showcasing her preposterously big tits (so big and pearlescent that you can see their damned veins) and playing the occasional R-rated Japanese dating sim. The watermark in the top right of

[1] Yes—I'm fully aware of both pieces' questionable reputations.

the screen advertises the OnlyFans she shares with her business boi side-guy boyfriend (not ZManus).[2]

This isn't how I wanted to spend my Saturday night, chewing on expired Tylenol in my basement suite and watching people I used to admire debase themselves. Yet, somehow, the notion of going out seemed less appealing.

I receive a message from a Discord friend, Julia.

> lia.pandax (now)
> *u on twitch rn, tq3.15 is live*

Leave it on read.

I should be doing my WUEC application.

I'm alternating between the stream and a Crystal Cafe thread on why men should be castrated if they're caught cheating. One user has posited that, morally speaking, depriving duplicitous men of their genitalia would instill a greater sense of romantic fidelity in future generations, both on a cultural and biological level. She has accompanied this post with a stock image meme of a guy in a doctor's office chair, having received a vasectomy, and John Cena superimposed over top saying "You Can't See Your Balls."

My room, like me, and unlike qt's, is nothing special to look at.[3]

qt is on all fours.

> lia.pandax (now)
> *sav!!*

The fervour is mounting. qt's posing has become increasingly elaborate. Sex toys have been introduced. Balloons. She's wearing white studs in the shape of

---

[2] I've seen stills of their videos—his dick isn't even big, and it's kinda bumpy and curved upward, like a goya gourd 🥒.

[3] You probably don't want to hear about the off-white walls my landlord won't let me repaint, the retro Orlando Bloom beach shots, Alice In Chains album covers, the framed movie poster for *Joker*; the knee-high bookshelf next to the adjustable-weight dumbbells, containing mostly manga and miscellaneous books (novels, poetry collections, plays); my slugs, Sisyphuses 1, 2, and 3; the lovely garden spider (*Araneus diadematus*) chilling in the corner of the ceiling, the purple UV lamps for my plants (string of hearts, Calathea Rosy, a Venus flytrap named Veenie 😉); the desk I got off "Lily" through FB Marketplace that I've since covered with a sticker of Picasso's "Guernica," a replica Arno Breker statue miniature, and car-guy anime thirst stickers on nearly every other inch of its surface—I get it.

crosses on the end of her nipple piercings. Several users would like to buy her things—pizza, show tickets, diamond rings. One offers to fly her out to Dubai for what I imagine would be the sketchiest sex of her life. "anything 4 u, boys 😘," she writes. No one has noticed the kid.

I had a miniature breakdown yesterday (there have been others recently) after receiving an Apple News update about how "God was dead" (we killed Him), but that Chinese researchers at Huazhong University had managed to create a new "God" out of fungi tissue, only to kill "Him" again hours later for fear of public panic.[4] I may never recover.

The biggest fixture in the room is the massive plush dinosaur I've somewhat ironically named Joe Rogan. He's one of those oversized amusement-park prize dinosaurs—the kind you get for winning the rigged ring-toss game. When I first got to Vancouver, I went to the PNE and spent $100 trying to win one of his brothers from a stall. I later went online, found their supplier, and bought J.R. directly from them because I couldn't find a way to win.

He's lying on his side, in the T-Rex fetal position. He won't move unless I get up and move him. I've been waiting years for him to one day spring into consciousness, hop up to his feet, and save me from this place, take me on his back to wherever a dinosaur would want to live in 202X. Anywhere, anywhere, *anywhere* but here.

So far, nothing.

> lia.pandax (now)
> *u gotta see this she's so hot, it's crazy she hasn't been shut down yet*

I haven't seen another person in five days—except for Dax.

[4] The real headline was about how Gen Z is dealing with a pair-bonding crisis.

2

Oreimo: My Little Roommate Can't Be This Cute!

Dax is a creature of sorts—an ambling, gelatinous beacon of contemporary dysgenic complacency.

At the time of our moving in three-and-a-half-ish years ago, he still had just a *sliver* of that glint you find in young men's eyes, that promise of Tannhäuserian intrepidness, some unspoken oath of unexpressed archetypal masculinity. He had just started his okay part-time job at a local comedy club, Dick Falino's (which I frequently visited, and continue to do so, half-enjoying the regional *life-as-a-dad-sure-is-tough*-type comedians, and the occasional used-to-be-famous-but-now-plays-Dick-Falino's-House-of-Comedy/Cum-in-New-West-BC-Canada-lol acts who're rounding out their careers in quiet, solemn affliction). He was in school for tHe LiBerAl ArTs and seemed to care about what he was studying. Guys liked him because he was easy-going, unpretentious, and simple enough to pose no risk or threat. Girls liked him for much the same reasons. In those days, his gaming habits were largely non-inhibiting, even if he did spend, on his off days *and* on days, six hours at a time playing *Final Fantasy XXIV* or wading through the latest FromSoftware spirit-breaking solo campaign. If anything, this made him endearing, much like how warthogs are when they're young and growing their first coat.

Sometimes, I'd join him and we'd play co-op campaigns on Steam—I'd use my laptop, and he'd use his Ryzen CPU, complete with light-up keyboard, not-quite-$700-but-still-expensive gaming chair, and Turtle Beaches. I'd sit on his bed (not fully soiled, cum-stained, and hiding vomit under it, as it is now). We'd munch whatever we had on hand. That first summer, we almost 100%'d *Left for Dead* and finished the old version of *Resident Evil 4* on Hard. His gamertag was LordBingus, which he uses for his YouTube account. Mine was SigmaxSavoy.

Dax has become a foul, bestial revision of his former self since.

That glint is ash now: I'd peg him as a manbaby far sooner than I would him a Tannhäuser (from the opera, but also the *Blade Runner* version, if that's more your speed). He still works his part-time job, but every shift now comes with an afterbirth rant about this-or-that customer, this-or-that manager, the cold tendies he had to eat on his too-short break. He's downgraded to part-

time studies (mostly online), and continues to bounce around between the soft sciences, the arts, and whatever the fuck else he's momentarily convinced he could make a career of. (This has involved joining a """"Philosophy Club""""" where, apparently, he philosophizes with a few of the women who can tolerate his stray, uninformed, and uninspired *Simpsons*-derived meditations on Nietzsche being "that German Nazi nihilist guy, right?")

Those decent looks of his have started to fall apart, with his once serviceable straight blonde hair now resembling the strands of a spent dish brush, his stomach having metastasized from a subtle paunch into a third-trimester womb for Hot Pockets and Prime Energy drinks.[5] All those hours spent at the computer have fucked his spine to hell, with his posture no better than the average question mark's. Miraculously, this still appeals to the philosophy girls and random down-on-their-luck Tinder whores, as they, though less frequently now, still clog up the main hallway of our suite, or overstay their welcome and commit to challenging, soul-withering sex some ten feet from where I sleep.

On this particular night, he has *Nevaeh* over. Nevaeh, bless her soul, looks like a 12-year-old loli.

Something in an old thread a few weeks back mentioned how Asians have flatter skull superstructures, and that this showed they were more developed in an evolutionary and intellectual sense.[6] Her head might as well be a cookie box it's so flat and upright. Couple that with the 4'9" stature, lack of body hair, and as-small-as-mine tits, and you've essentially got a domestic loli. And I've had to draw enough loli porn in my day to know what sick fucks like Dax want to do to them.[7]

I can hear from the other side of the hallway that he's pulling his tried-and-true routine of sitting the night's casualty on his irreverently soiled bed and giving her nothing to do while he plays *Valorant* or some new side-scroller shooter featuring sentient meat blobs.[8]

Nevaeh's probably scrolling through IG, or investigating the three Polaroid photos stapled to the mini corkboard sheet I bought for him so he'd be able

[5] He's tried every flavour and rushes out to buy every new one as soon as it drops. He'd drain an "Apricot Arsenic" if they offered it.

[6] Naturally, my oblong head and broad blaqqq girl lips made me something of an early hominid on this scale.

[7] In the coombrain theatre of his mind, loli lesbian porn plays on repeat.

[8] The fucking guy puts on his headphones while they're here to hear the SFX better. *And* he has the audacity to make his normal gamer noises: *AUUHH! Eugggh. You should kill yourself—NOW!*

to lay out his goals and tasks more easily (I'm in one of the photos with my mouth open, as if I'm about to eat the camera), or just staring at the wall, as vapid dating-app bimbos are wont to do.

Here's the rest of his playbook, in case you're curious: Soon, Bimbo Serial #XXX will start fidgeting. Dax will take this as a sign that #XXX is in need of sustenance. He will offer her a beverage (a Bubly being the primary option, as he has type 1 diabetes) from his mini fridge (he always forgets to ask when they first get to the room). She will either accept the drink offer or request food. If she accepts the drink, she will remain quiet for another 20 minutes and then, 95% of the time, revert to the latter. In the event that she requests food, Dax will open a delivery app and order her whatever slop she feels inclined to force down her jailbait gullet. It will take anywhere from 10 to 35 minutes to arrive. In that time, she will remain quiet. When the food does arrive, should we still be on this path, he will notify her of this and ask that she go retrieve it from our front door. After she has obtained the slop, they will eat it on his bed or at his computer desk and chatter about nonsense. He may even provide a stolen monologue about Plato being gay or Camus doing meth—*which he didn't.*[9] This will delight Bimbo #XXX. Soon, they will leave the refuse created from their meal in the corner by the door and both take to his marred bed. Anywhere from 2 to 10 minutes later, you will hear the rumblings of intercourse—the wet pancake slapping of ill-defined gamer flesh on sad loli flesh. This will last shockingly long, and may occur several times throughout the night while you try valiantly to cover it up with the audio from art instructionals.

Tonight, Nevaeh requests food.

Tannhäuser's sick, Prime-fueled cousin duly provides.

I try to find a video on upper-level cross-hatching and pre-emptively turn it up to full volume.

[9] The best monologues are about his growing @LordBingus YouTube channel, which boasts 47 subscribers. He doesn't tell them how few he has because they like the idea that he *could* be famous in time.

3
"I Draw, Jon—It's What I Do"

To supplement my café job pittance, and to escape from Dax's miserable sexual quasi-crimes, I produce artwork and animations (rarely) for pop-up ads, internet forum banners, and individual commissions. Most clients have me create cartoonishly full-figured women to attract men to their mobile games, while porn companies hire me to animate fetishistic "copulatory" scenarios.[10] I'm provided with a rough outline of what they want: what the characters should look like (skin colour, species, size of genitalia *[crucial]),* what act is being performed (groping, penetration, violence), what it will link to, and so on. Not sure what my individual clients do with my work.

When you do this long enough, this artistic sacrilege, you begin to see sex like bloodless dance choreography.

When I was about 14 and maybe 2 days into trying to make it as a creative in the modern post(-post?)-industrial, late(-late?)-capitalistic technocratic ecosystem (are we even further along?), I realized no one wanted to pay for the art of an up-and-comer with an affinity for aping classical aesthetics. They hardly wanted to pay for the art of the *established* creatives. So, rather than let my creative instincts go to waste, I transitioned to digital and started posting things to DeviantArt and other spots that got lots of organic traffic, where folks were selling their rather ham-fisted illustrations of beloved characters. It was unbelievable: $100 for a crayon-generated depiction of Sonic eating a burrito; $75 for Squirtle holding a Filipino flag; $200 for Danny Phantom caressing Sam Manson's hot alt chick hand—and usually in USD, too. Even if I had caught the tail-end of this age of internet innocence, I was ecstatic at the chance to contribute.

My initial posts as "SavoyAhoy:)" were objectively awful, but that made them a good fit for the platform. Sometimes, I'd type out the positive comments people left on my work and print them out, fold them up, and hide them under my bed. It didn't matter what was going on between Janice and Winston (my parents—we'll get to them) at the time, or if they'd left me to fend for myself again. A community *wanted* me.

Tumblr had come into my life around this time and changed the fuckin' game, too. Our culture is inundated with nostalgia worship (you've seen

[10] You're welcome for some of the late-stage *Overwatch* porn.

the "le epic '90s kid" memes, the gratuitous retro cartoon adoration, the interminable YouTube essays on why video games were so much more EPIC 20 years ago), but the Tumblr of 2012-2016 was legitimately exceptional, my Roman empire (🐂👸).

Tumblr was like a secret online club where you could connect with people who really saw the world a little differently, people who "got it." You'd encounter fanfic stories about marrying Edward Cullen, heated debates about the efficacy and merits of using "XD" over ":D," disquisitions on fake units of measurement (I later found out "Cuil Theory" came from Reddit, but whatever). We even had a secret code—if you wanted to see if someone was with it, you'd just say "I like your shoelaces," and if they responded with "I stole them from the President," you knew you had met a fellow user.[11]

Gradually, with these influences, my landscape pieces and wistful social stills turned into depictions of Benedict Cumberbatch as a potato and scalene triangles wearing fedoras. I didn't dare tell anyone I was gaining followers for my stuff, or that I was getting paid commissions. I rarely saw the money, anyway. I'd needed a bank account to accept and withdraw the funds, but Janice wouldn't go with me to the bank to set one up, so I had to use hers. Mysteriously, the money I did accept always went missing under Janice's watch. As a result, I had to convert later commissions to DeviantArt points, which wasn't nearly as impressive.

But times change, and the days of innocence on the internet drew to a close.[12] 2016, for reasons you probably already know (thanks for the astroturfing, internet agencies and 3-letter lapdogs), marked a seismic shift in internet culture, turning it away from quirky "Millennial" humour to the full-blown insanity of Gen Z humour.

People didn't want to see drawings of stoned Sonic or starchy Sherlocks and Watsons anymore—they wanted politically charged stuff. Nonsense pieces. Aggro stuff. The comments under my fluff pieces became increasingly apathetic, shrinking in number with every month. I still wasn't doing it for the money, and I'd gotten a hell of a lot better, but DeviantArt points had become an indication of my "value" to the internet. So I took a couple of "unusual" commissions, not knowing the first thing about sex beyond the porn clips from pop-ups. No one had seemed even remotely interested

[11] I tried it once when I was puttering around at the mall, and no one responded, so I stopped—but I read many stories of it working for people at concerts and on public transit.

[12] Ironically, Tumblr died when they finally banned porn in 2017. Losing Big Daddy Dave didn't help matters either.

in doing "the sex" with me in person, and I was afraid to touch myself, so I didn't even know what it was supposed to feel like. The first ever adult commission I did was for a user by the name of "BeeBao," who wanted Fubuki from *One-Punch Man* in a green bikini. It took two days, and he gave me $100 for it.

By the time I made it onto Crystal Cafe (deffo more on that shortly), I was a bona fide Dykelangelo.

And here we are, thousands of dicks and tentacles and vaginas and tits in.

Today's commission:

> *Concept: Jordan Peterson having forceful, unprotected sex w/ a blushing Ben Shapiro.*
>
> *Format: Digital*
>
> *Specs: 300 DPI*
>
> *Special Requests: Peterson should look healthy and robust (about 45% more muscular than usual—pre-benzo phase) and a little mean—definite dom energy; Shapiro should look bashful, cock-crazed, in pain, but in a good way—like he's fully aware of the tabooness of it all—wearing garter belts and lingerie and his yarmulke—think gay, ripe Anne Frank—& in the background, "Fags don't care about your feelings!"; any art style—not too cartoonish.*
>
> *Purpose of Use: Commercial* (kek)

I switch from the cross-hatching video to YT reference videos for the piece. (Art should always be done with a perverse sense of curiosity.)

Peterson talks Twitterati, the importance of Christian values while still in the thralls of benzo withdrawals—"Well, you know, actually, that is to say that, evolutionARILY speaking, y'know, the *dominant man* would get the girl, and he'd leave the rest to the rabble, the gossipers, the bloody social justice types!"; Shapiro advocates US involvement in worsening Middle Eastern Conflict #732, subsection B; talks inflation + non-Christian values—"The Left have the strange notion—very strange, indeed—of some great economic boogeyman coming down and periodically rigging things against them—conservatives and such—when, in reality, it's they themselves, with their constant overspending and economic mismanagement—just look at what's going on in Detroit! Anyway, the US Government *does* have enough money to bomb Iran..."

I keep having to erase Peterson's throbbing cock. Can't get the angle right.

Oh, yes—so happy to have stayed in...

At 1:21 AM, a knock interrupts the cock-refinement. It's a hoarse, beleaguered Dax from the other side of the door. I'm prone on my bed, holding my iPad aloft.

"Hey, uhhhh...," he starts, in his customary brainrot parlance.

"What's up?"

"Nevaeh's gonna, like, stay the night."

"What?"

"Nevaeh's gonna—"

"Open the door."

He opens it, and I immediately regret letting the stank in.

"Nevaeh's gonna stay the night," he declares again, leaning on the door frame, Uniqlo *Naruto* T-shirt half covering his gut. "Do we have any clean towels? She wants ta take a showerrr."

"Have you checked the dryer?"

"Uhhhh..." (That's a no.)

"There should be at least one clean one in there. I was gonna use it, but whatever."

"Well, fuckiiin, I could, like, do the laundry in the mornin."

He won't. No matter what he says, he won't. I know his routine better than mothers know their snot-nosed children.

"I'll remind you in the morning. Check your phone."

"Sweet, vro. Tee-why. So, whatcha up tooo?"

"Drawing."

Dax says he wants to *hang* while she showers. I tell him it's a free country. He leaves to get her a towel and returns two minutes later. She's probably gonna use my specialty shea butter shower cream, too. I swear...

"So what do you think of her?" Dax asks, poking at the edge of one of my Alice In Chains posters (*Dirt*) and scratching his balls.

"She's kinda...*small*."

"I dunno, m*a*n.[13] It's whatever. She's pretty ight. She's studyin botany or horticultury or...somethin?"

That bitch wants to be what I want to be.

"And did you guys...?"

Daxhäuser flashes a sly grin.

I can hear her knocking over bottles in the hair-encrusted shower.

"Does she go to our school?"

"Yezzir."

"Neat."

Peterson's cock seems too...robust? Veiny? Can't tell. I'm re-drawing while he talks.

"Oh, vro, were you, uhhhh, still gonna cum to the show tomorrow? We haven't sold many tickets, so, like, cummm whenever."

"Yeah, I'll probably be there."

"Matt said he wanned you ta try the new burger we've added to the menu."[14]

"Is it also named after a famous comedian, like the rest of the entrées?"

"Duh. And you should bring your date. You gonna go with that guy who asked you out?"

"Not sure. This is the first time I've been asked out in a long while. Haven't given him an answer yet. It's been two weeks. He's probably moved on."

"Vro, maybe you should jusss try. You can't jus draw all day."

"Dax."

[13] When he's happy, he's got this way of inflecting of vowel in "man" up so that it sounds like corrupted Valley-Girl speak.

[14] Matt works in the kitchen—40s, married, jovially miserable. Very funny. Good fit for Dick Falino's.

"Yuh?"

"Yesterday, I turned 23.8281," I say, propping myself up against my pillows, eyes trained on the small tear he's absent-mindedly creating in my Orlando Bloom poster to match the other ones he's made. "By Ancient Mesopotamian standards, I'm already used goods. Beyond middle-aged. Life as a girl doesn't get better as you get older—it gets worse. I'm not sure any boy in this lifetime will love me. I'm already spoilt. And your kind can't love anymore. Haha." (Dax looks puzzled.) "Just kidding. Maybe I will go on that date. It's not like the one guy I *actually* like will ever ask me out. I have nothing left to lose. Thanks, Apple News notification!"

"Ooooh. That's tough, b."

The water's been turned off. LordBingus stops fucking with my stuff.

"Guess she's done already," I say.[15]

"Aight. I'mma gonna go see what she's up to. Catch you later, m*a*n."

Now my room smells foul. Thank you, Dax. And now the angle of Ben Shapiro's dick seems a hair or two off. Why is this one causing me so much grief?

C'est la D.

4

Stalky-Walky 😚

I lied earlier. When I said I hadn't seen anyone but Dax for the last five days. I'd seen Avery.

Ooh! Who's AAAveryyyy?

Avery's the boy I've been stalking. (In a cute way! He he! 😁)

Observing—let's call it *observing*.

No, let's call it *courting*.

I've been courting him.

[15] Must've pulled a pussy plunge. Eww.

He works at Panacea, the more successful *younger brother* version of the café I work at, Cure. If we're home to Central-ish Vancouver's third-best quasi-Italian-café-based tikka masala (according to Tripadvisor), they're home to the best one.

At the time of my hiring, both cafés were one and were run by my current boss, Raphael—an Algerian Sephardic Jewish/Italian expat with an affinity for fake asses (don't ask how I know) and expensive retro espresso machines (he told me during the interview that he'd just purchased a vintage 1952 Gaggia for $20,000, which he felt was a steal, and was considering bringing it in to use in the café [never did])—and his business partner, my now-former boss, Aman.

Aman was a 60-something Sri Lankan man originally from Colombo, old enough at the time to be over fake asses—and sex altogether—so our dealings were always pleasant. He was responsible for the design of our menu and for teaching us how to best prep the ingredients for him, as well as how to best warm up the food for our customers.[16] Aman preferred to do all the cooking himself; he'd sit in the back kitchen area, a claustrophobic 8'x6' white-tiled sweatbox of a kitchen, and make the entrées and pastries all by himself, including our then-#1-in-West-Van quasi-Italian-café-sourced tikka masala.

In those days, Cure was a bit of a hotspot, with local Vancouver celebrities (we don't have many) coming through.[17] We also used to host Meetup groups for unsociable people; writers' collectives who'd hoard all the chairs for four hours straight—first dates, anniversaries, grad celebrations. Everything.

But six months into my tenure here, Raphael came up with the scintillating idea of cutting costs by reducing the portion sizes of our meals and by swapping out some of the fresh ingredients, like the avocado on the avocado toast (garbo now—don't order) for imitation avocado that shows up vacuum-sealed, looking like some sort of beyond-X endocrine system catastrophe. We also started freezing all of our entrées in the back. The ingredients and portion sizes for the coffee and drinks were to stay roughly the same.

Predictably, this led to Aman's unceremonious departure, as well as his establishing Panacea, a stone's throw away on Granville, which now boasts

[16] He hated microwaves, so we had to memorize how long each dish had to spend in the oven, which rack it had to go on, and so forth.

[17] I'd fail to identify them until one of my coworkers would ask me about the interaction after the fact. According to them, I once served Chad Kroeger a latte with four sugars and a shit-ton of caramel pumps added, and I didn't even bat an eye???

a 4.7-star Google Reviews rating (231 reviews) to our 3.6 (208 reviews), and roughly 75% of our former clientele. Raphael, fucking moron that he is, hates to hear about Aman's success, so I (along with the couple of us left from the Cure golden age) have to sneak over there on my breaks to order food and visit Aman.

Now I work alongside a few stragglers from Cure's halcyon days, like Maria, my big-*bunda*'d Brazilian work wife, and together we offer smooth Yirgacheffes and venomous Death Wish-brand arabica brews and tetraploid dark matter imitation food to rude guys named Raj who end up asking for ice water and free sugar packets instead!!!

Right—the courting. You wanna know how a stalking starts, don't you? If you're me, it goes a bit like this:

> I first saw Avery two weeks ago at Panacea during a routine post-work tikka masala-concerned visit.
>
> And Ye verily:——I, a femoide most lamentable, sexualie hapless, and unholie, dids't understand in that moment, that fraction of temporalitee, whyst the neckbeards so reidiculed onlieyne, and to whom mine supposèd kinde werest, isst reported, eternally in opposition, doth speak with such magniloquent devotion *apropos* those jyst met———!
>
> As if emerging from the dappled Sea of Antiquity, my newly hired beloved and his beautiful head burgeoned from beyond the door frame of the Panacea kitchen as I was taking my seat to do some doodling, and I fell into a manic state that someone as fucked up as me could only approximate was extreme infatuation—celestial limerence—love. His features were that of a Grecian *kouros*, fully extant and locked in the thralls of youthful brilliance. In profile, I could see the chisel of his aquiline nose, grey hunter eyes (accentuated by his squinting), alabaster skin, flaxen locks.[18] And his voice was the most delicious mixture of lyre and tympanum, lightly melodic but resonant and husky (O, *Do you need any more napkins?* O, sweet Apollo—sound it again!) What kindness he displayed to the ungrateful Rajas he had to serve!
>
> Most men fill me with Daxian dread, a visceral, nerve-fraying disgust from which I'd like to flee at all costs, but he was special, supernal. I could tell.

[18] If this were an IG comment section, all the guys would be mirin' and saying he was a looksmaxxer and was straight mogging everyone else there.

> I watched him from my table in the corner. Watched him fiddle with his new name tag, tug at the corners of the white button-down beneath his apron, place lids upon cups. Everything he did was done with a curiosity and mirth so exceedingly delicate—I couldn't pin it down.
>
> He got on instantly with his Asian babygirl coworker (Estelle, her name tag claimed), who quickly began touching his shoulder (a little too much! 😡) when passing by him. No customers seemed to get angry with him if he was slow or too friendly or simply physically extant. Without realizing it, I'd been consumed. I started drawing him.

That's how this kind of courting starts. One minute, you're drawing someone, the next, you're "accidentally" finding yourself in the Panacea area daily (a dismal 45-minute bus ride from my place, through asphalt and glass and late-winter meteorological buffoonery, or a brisk 5-minute walk from my work) and you're "accidentally" using your proximity to your beloved's workplace to formulate an approximation of his shift schedule. This leads you to surmise that Avery Bazin (24, M) works Mondays from 3:00 PM to 10:00 PM, Thursdays from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM, and Sundays from noon to 6:00 PM. Roughly. Morning shifts get thrown in. (I didn't surreptitiously peek at his name tag and then the schedule they had hanging near the front counter while I was going to the washroom that first day. For sure *didn't* do that...)

Which all may or may not snowball into you combing through the café's IG until you find his handle so you can initiate a dastardly creep session wherein your fingers hang so delicately over the photos that you can feel the grooves of your fingers pulsating as you restrain yourself from interacting with his elegant and unpretentiously refined profile, and reveling in tasteful pics of rare vegetation from his recent trip to Hawaii (visiting his older sister), and the occasional shot of nights out with friends (he has both male and female friends that mogg me brutally, with their teeth, so white, their body fat percentages so low—ahhh!—but a prince must keep beautiful company—not that they're anywhere near as flawless as him!), and pics from art gallery visits, and traces of his own art?[19]

And this creeping may require of you a deep clean of your remaining IG profile (the only one you haven't deleted because a certain ex of yours sees fit to *still* make fresh accounts to harass you from afar). This may include deleting soyjack memes, a few posts about your pet slugs, the photo edits of you as Timothée Chalomet playing Willy Wonka, the vestigial shots

[19] That he only has 2046 followers, 64% of whom are female (I ran the numbers), is a crime!

from your time as a rare Pepe aficionado that are diabolical and a clear demonstration of *mentaw iwness* [([😵])], but nothing someone would try to get you committed over.

And then there's the "name meaning" searches. ("Avery" meant "wise," according to one site. Another said: "power." Both sounded good. And "Bazin," his last name, meant "from royalty.") And many other X, Y, and Z "getting to know him" things.

(I haven't been able to order from him yet. As soon as Avery's within earshot, the stuttering begins. The staff must think I'm disabled.)

Anyway, I've spent something like $300 at this café over the last two weeks, and I'm fully aware that a guy of his calibre will never like me. I've resolved myself to a fate of observation. And drawing. Always drawing...

At least I'm funny, right?

5
Funny Man

Sunday night. Dick Falino's Fuck Shack again. Sitting in the far corner, nibbling on the "Don Rickles' Pickles" burger (pickles suck—dunno why I got this—thanks, Matt), answering messages on Discord. It's a little disrespectful to the comedians, sure, but tonight's offering, all the way from the progressive, exotic, homeless-besieged Portland, Oregon, is Matt O'Brian (another Matt), a bloated, Marvel-graphic-T-bedecked beggar of a man who couldn't write a novel joke if he dug up Norm Macdonald's corpse, reanimated it, and paid it to divulge its trade secrets. These sets are the fuckin' dribbling shits. The formula:

Opener about how nice it is to be here.

Quick joke about the differences between his city and this one.

Another compliment to get the crowd on his side.

Introduction of theme #1 in form of medium-length anecdote (pick: being a dad/stepdad, being married [bitch wife = BAD!], loving being a bachelor [girlfriend = BAD!], SPORTS!!! [GOOD!], food 🤤, having penis [thank fuck COVID sets are no longer a thing—we've just struck those from the list]).

Quip (x3).

Bland crowd work ("Any married couples here?")

Segue joke ("Actually, X is a lot like Y if you think about it.")

Introduction of theme #2 in the form of longer anecdote (pick: dating in 202X, corporate past, generational differences, obsession with piece of media or series).

Tie-together joke(s) to link themes #1 and #2.

"That's my time, folks. I'm Generic Never-Gonna-Make-It Moid Comic."

God, it's sick.

Right now, he's midway through a medium-length, Jim Gaffigan-esque *Subway-sandwich-artists-aren't-real-artists-I-just-want-my-damned-food-why-do-you-always-take-so-long-are-you-raising-the-pigs-and-slaughtering-them-yourself-back-there?* fiasco, and I can't be fucked to care.

The 20-strong crowd isn't terribly into it either, but they're doing their best to keep the mood convivial by occasionally chuckling or clapping half-heartedly.

The Sunday-night crowds are largely made up of 50-something professionals from the immediate area and 20- or 30-something couples on first dates.[20] Beyond that, there are typically a few stragglers who wander in for the hell of it or who have nothing better to do, one or two people taking notes because they think they're good enough to try stand-up themselves (me), and one outcast retard loser (in this case, also me).

To give you a sense for the theatre itself: Envisage the Moulin Rouge, but if you shrank it and put it in the microwave for too long. In every corner, you'll see traces of its former status as an old-capital playhouse—ruffled curtains, golden mouldings, faded lattice, the occasional cherub holding aloft an urn. The blacks, burgundies, and golds survived a mid-'80s post-modernization attempt (stinky!) and in the years since, through outright neglect, have deliquesced into the bones of a Pinterest mood-board for a retro dining hall.

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[20] N.B.—DO NOT TAKE YOUR DATE TO A COMEDY CLUB UNLESS YOU KNOW THEM WELL—THERE'S NO TIME TO TALK ONCE THE ROUTINES START, AND IT'S SUPER AWKWARD IF ONE PERSON LAUGHS AND THE OTHER DOESN'T. MOST OF THE TIME, ONE OF YOU ENDS UP STARING AT THE OTHER, LOOKING FOR THEIR APPROVAL. AVOID AT ALL COSTS!

The potential is still there, though (we won't speak of the dreadful practice room they installed upstairs that now blocks the entrance to the retired mezzanine).

My DRP burger is going cold, and I'm beginning to suspect that the peculiar black flecks on the patty and grilled bun are somehow toxic Teflon flakes that will sink into the deepest recesses of my body if consumed, so I push it aside. Besides, the pickle is miscut in such a way that it's now shaped more like a shaved carrot or circumcised penis, and I don't want to imagine biting into Rickles' crusty beef bayonet.

Julia is blowing up my phone (I have no friends irl anymore—I used to, but...) about some new anime they're watching, *The Transfer Student is Secretly Disabled* ☆~~, and how they're planning on travelling to Tokyo for three weeks with their two friends, Migg and Dana, to work on their Japanese and eat fresh soba and "maybe even go down to Kyoto like in that Phoebe Bridgers song!"

I've been telling them that a while back when I was super into the Ghibli films and would daydream about being the one to emotionally repair Howl from *Howl's Moving Castle*, I thought about learning Japanese and bought one of those *Japanese in Literally Two Seconds* books with the waifus and husbandos on the cover and tried for a couple weeks (told them months, to save a little face), but ultimately found it too hard 'cause there was no one to practice with (the crucial reason was that none of the so-called intuitive mnemonics about triangle-tree characters or any of that shit stuck). And now they're saying that they've been practicing with Bernard, the second (2/2), more recent "ex" of mine, who cheated on me a week after we got together.[21]

And I just now typed that I was happy for them in Japanese after looking it up on Google Translate and pasting it into the chat, and they sent me an *arigato* ٩(^ ᵕ ^)۶ and are now typing something else.

O'Brian-san has made it through the segue and is attempting to relate choosing a Subway 12-inch sub to choosing a wife ("So many options! Who wants to just eat one sandwich for the rest of their life? Like, gimme the Sexy Thai Tuna Melt with extra mayo today. Maybe I'll wake up and want the Italian Meatball sub tomarrah!")

I think I want to kill this man.

Letting go a boo would be nice, but instead, I exaggerate a yawn, which fucks up his departure, so he makes a remark about me being a Subway Sandwich

[21] Julia was the one who introduced us, the one time I met them in real life.

Artist™ plant or a sandwich no one wants. Whichever. I leave a $20 on the table and head to the washroom to wet my face and stare in the mirror at my uneven mudball eyes.

Damon messages me again about going out tomorrow. Resist?

6

Date Day with Uni Bae (People Who Still Use the Word "Bae" Should Be Rounded up and Chemically Castrated)

Caved. Date today—downtown. Evening-ish. "Damon" from school.

Not Avery; therefore: not excited.

(To repeat: Will never be good enough for Avery, so need to be realistic and find someone "on my level.")

Ran into Damon on campus.[22] He spotted me on the roof of one of the science buildings and said I "looked cool."

Let him pick the place: He's gone with Pink Avocado, a bougie TikTok-friendly spot on the edge of the Business District—type of place that has at least one fuzzy wall, minimum. $9.00 lattes. Michelle Obama quotes by chalkboard menu. Rat problem in the storage.

I'm dressed in all-black, per usual—combat boots, black turtleneck, black overcoat, and Oakley Four sunglasses; makes me look like a gay, mulatto femboy Blade.

From what I remember, he's sort of okay-looking, in a soft-boi way. Touques for every outfit.

Enter café and scan for redhead I know to be Damon. Spot him right beside the fuzzy wall. *Make memories. Make love.* enshrined in the middle (thanks, Michelle).

"Hope I didn't keep you waiting too long," I offer.

"Oh, no. Not too long."

[22] I'm not taking classes right now—or ever again?—but I still hang out up there sometimes.

"Being fashionably late is sort of my thing."

"I can see that. And, by the looks of it—" (He gives me the ol' up-and-down moids are wont to do) "—that's not the only part of you that's fashionable."

I ask if he likes the Blade aesthetic.

"It's...something!"

Stark contrast to his wool sweater (brown), high-waisted neo-acid wash jeans, platform mesh-panel trainers. Stacked fake silver rings (assorted geometric) on both hands. *Beanie*. (🥲)

He's enjoying a latte. Has a couple tattoos—nothing crazy: lotus flower on wrist, hint of dogwood petals on sternum.[23] Blonde streaks in his red hair—wavy. Meh.

He insists on formal introductions: "My name's Damon Ivory Gearhardt. Virgo."

Me: "I'm Savoy. Like, 'Sav-oi.' The last name's complicated. *Matviyenko*. It's Ukrainian. No middle name. And...Leo."

Gentle handshake.

"Very nice. Leo—you must be courageous and daring."[24]

"Totally. Uhh...I'll go get a croissant or something so they don't think I'm freeloading. One sec."

I like "courageously" scouting out the competition whenever I'm out like this, seeing how they stack up against Cure. They've got a bunch of "unabashedly buttery!" options at the front. Go for the ube-infused, gold-leaf-topped "*ube*r-croissant."

Server is an early-30s ponytail type. Frail. Shock of blue hair dye near right temple. Reeks of MFA. Many such cases. A little nervous card will get declined, but it works. No tip—Ponytail: upset. Bit of sass when he says "your croissant."

Back at the table, Damon, who'd been watching: "Everything okay? That guy seemed miffed. He wasn't when he served me."

---

[23] Joking, but can't know for sure.

[24] Couldn't be further from the truth.

"Oh, it was nothing. I told him I didn't like the latest *Paris Review* issue."

"What's that?"

Ugh. How do *I* know about this and he doesn't? Whatever. We'll go with something he does know. I hear men like to feel like they're in charge intellectually. A Harvard study/*Vice* article/pisspost I saw a while back claimed as much. "You are the English major, aren't you?"

"I am! And I wanna use it to become an English teacher."

"You must like reading, then? I'm in STEM, but I've had a lot of free time to read over the years."

"Really? What's your favourite book?"

Have to choose wisely. Many paths to take when trying to appear as totally normal girl who "reads." A classic *(Moby Dick, Canterbury Tales):* ⬆️ Perceived Intelligence, ⬇️ Attraction. Something easy or relatable *(Where the Crawdads Sing,* ghost-written celebrity tell-all, YA written by chronically immature early-40s woman, anything by Dr. Seuss): ⬆️ Comfort, ⬇️ Perceived Intelligence. Something edgy (*Harassment Architecture, Whatever, For My Legionnaires*): ⬆️ Intimidation, ⬇️ Comfort. Something "indie" or "fresh" or "different" (*The Garbage Times/White Ibis, Fuccboi, My First Book*): ⬆️ Confusion, ⬇️ Confidence.

I just want to seem normal for once. It would be easier that way. Think: pair bond! A man can love you! You are enough! You will not end up alone, drawing *Breaking Bad* vore the rest of your life for petty change. (😕) Today's choice: "My favourite right now is *Homebody* by Rupi Kaur," I say, expiring inside.

"Oh, neat! Her stuff is super popular. I think she came out with writing prompt cards recently. A friend bought them for us to use."

"I know a lot of people give Rupi flack for being a thoroughly talentless, third-rate, identity politic-heavy, IG-tier hackjob, but I think her work speaks a lot of truth. In many ways, it's what our generation needs and deserves!"

"Right? There's nothing wrong with enjoying so-called 'easy' poetry. She speaks her truth her way. Actually, I heard she was doing a live-reading show in the area. *Actually*, it was that same friend of mine. She said Rupi sits on stage and goes through her best poems while the illustrations for them scroll in the background. It's supposed to be really tastefully done. You can buy wine at the event. I'm a sucker for pinot gris. Maybe if we get along, we could go to one eventually."

He looks genuinely happy. Dimples at the corner of his mouth are an unuttered invitation. Still, he's no Avery. And now he wants to know if I'd care to go for a walk around the core? Because *as nice as this place is, it's not quite as nice as a sunset in the city...* 🌄🥲🐒

Sunsets are the shadows normies watch in Plato's Cave, but what's the harm? Before I get up to grab a to-go bag, he glances over at the pink wall and asks me if I could do him a teeny-weeny favour. I guess: "Would you like me to take a picture of you in front of the wall?"

"Oh, could you really? It's just this is my first time being here, and this Vancouver YouTuber I follow keeps posting about it. Only if you're okay with it."

(So he's a *turbo*-softboi, then.)

We stride on over to the wall. Can't stop looking at the quotation in the middle. Begin to mull over Mrs. Obama's imperative with grave determination. Damon positions himself (*themselves*, now that I think about it?), his/their/? hand forming a makeshift frame under the word LOVE. Kicks his left foot back to show spunkiness. Beams.

MAKE MEMORIES.

Click.

I grind out a smile.

MAKE LOVE.

Click.

His lock screen is a mountaintop view.

(WHAT THE FUCK AM I DOING? THIS IS SO BORING! WE HAVE NEGATIVE CHEMISTRY!!!)

"Let me go get that to-go bag from the front. Be right back," I say.

Ponytail's still there, still mad. Gives me smallest one he has. Croissant barely fits.

He looks at the tip jar while passing the paper sleeve over. Mini sign above it says, "Help support our staff's academic dreams!"

Don't.

Turn and walk back to Damon. "Shall we?"

♀

After eating the ube-flavoured slop and taking in the sunset (bleak, diaphanous, cold) by the Vancouver Art Gallery (the VAG, lol), we head to Damon's.

Down on East 1st. One of those '10s/'20s homes scooped up by the city's wealthiest and turned into rental properties. Wistful yard. The owners left their gnomes.

Has three roommates. Low-key terrified my girl autism will show through. Kinda wanna bail, but this is the first person other than Dax I've hung out with in too long.

"Which part are you?" I ask.

"3001-4. It's a division of 7."

Even post-constructional vivisection, it has character: squealing floorboards, cracked walls, swelling windowsills. Like an M.C. Escher lithograph given life.

Enter into the main room. Three of the potential million living in the house sitting on the floor, on a carpet, playing UNO. Midway through a round. Fully absorbed. I'm rusty with socialization, but I've watched enough teen films recently to know how to navigate being introduced to a new group. Your key move: act nonchalant—no matter if you're secretly the most chalant.

So when the bespectacled girl closest to us says (without looking back), "Damon? Is that you? How'd the hang go? You didn't reply. I was worried 'fro girl might've murdered you," and Damon goes, "Uhm, actually, this is Savoy. Murder girl," you go, "Sup?" and roll with it. It's that easy.

BG, who introduces herself as Alysson, says Damon had shown her pictures of me—and that she likes my "big hair." Then, we have the others: Rahim—massive, Egyptian-ish, guy; Gwen—hot, Afro-Canadian, giraffe-girl (gay giraffe girl, maybe?—kind of a fun thought). They hardly look up to greet me, but "chill dude" code dictates I cock an eyebrow and perform a head nod in their direction, so I end up nodding at the tops of their skulls. Flawless execution.

Alysson: "We're in the middle of this best-of-three at the moment, but we could totes get you in on the next one if you like. Do you know how to play?"

Damon: "Oh, she probably doesn't want to—"

Me: "I wouldn't mind giving it a go, but I wouldn't want to intrude."[25]

Alysson: "No prob. Give us ten."

Damon leads me to the kitchen in the meantime. Never seen so many refrigerator magnets. ("They're for fun.") They've got the word ones where you can build funny sentences.

Chat a little while we stand by the pantry for no reason. Learning so much about him: loves tandoori chicken; hates bubble tea (too sweet!). Watches true crime documentaries; doesn't watch reality TV. Listens to pop. Listens to rap, but not old rap. Parents are divorced. Siblings are younger. Went through an action figure phase when he was 12. Now 20. Scottish/Irish/Dutch. Was bad at P.E. Wanted to be a doctor (obstetrician); didn't have the grades. Had to settle for English (still a point of contention with the fam).

Sitting at kitchen table. Moon streaks scratching at windows. The moon's so haunting from the kitchen of someone else's home...

Bored already. Increasingly nervous. (Is he trying to fugg?) Refuse to show it.

Damon wants to know more about me. "If you could go anywhere in the world right now, where would you go?" he asks, as if reading directly from an article containing "cool questions you can ask your date!" It's impossible to answer without sounding like a court reporter.

"Easy. Russia. Or Dick Falino's."

"Oh, I like Dick Falino's! I've been meaning to go back for so long! But *Russia?* Why?"

"I'd like to drink vodka all day, drive a clapped-out Slav car, and blast Russian doomer music 24/7."

"Ohh...You're not one of those 'Sad Wojak' types, are you?"

(Yes. Unequivocally.) "Nope."

"Good—you had me worried! They leave weird comments on the videos I watch. Always talking about societal decay. Okay, next one: What's one really weird or random fact about you?"

[25] I've played with Dax, but two-player UNO sucks ballzzz.

"Hmm...A random fact..."

"Anything you like."

"Anything?"

I fiddle with a few of the fridge magnets and disrupt a sentence one of them has made about self-discovery.

"The only real long-term boyfriend I've ever had—the one I had to live with because my mom's a crack whore and my dad's a deadbeat-turned-pimp turned deadbeat all over again—beat me up constantly and tried to kill me once with gasoline and a lighter and cheated on me with other women, transexuals, and random men, and now I don't sleep at night because the lasting trauma is immeasurable."

Pause.

"Just kidding, Damon. Don't look so spooked!"

"Ha ha...I didn't realize your sense of humour could get that...*grim*. You're just like Alysson. She doesn't sleep much. Are you sure you're kidding about that part?"

"I could probably get more sleep, but I don't suffer from any particular sleep-related afflictions at this time." (I do.)

"I hope not. I can't get by without my eight." *(Leans on counter.)* "Okay, okay. What's a social cause you care about?"

"A social cause. A social cause..." (Feel I could answer with anything. Jester's privilege.) "I think, given recent revelations regarding worsening economic disparities and pernicious social policies advanced by globalist elites, we should systematically ki—"

A cheer from the other room and Alysson yells: "Damon, cool 'fro girl, you're up!"

"So those are the rules, 'Fro. Any questions?" Alysson finishes.

"No, ma'am."

"'No, ma'am'! You're a hoot!"

We're in the middle of the living room, having joined in on the carpet-sitting. Lo-fi being played through the TV. Many Hey Y'all cans strewn about. (Haven't had any.) Crusty burger wrappers on the coffee table. Wonder how long they've been at it. Rahim hands out the cards.

I try to flex my chillaxer wurk, but from this point on, it's a lot of hooting and hollering and asking if I want a Hey Y'all and them asking me what I do and me telling them I do art—digital stuff—porn commissions, mainly—and them laughing at this and calling me "a riot" and telling me Gwen makes African tapestries and beadworks for Etsy and letting me know I should buy some or trade some of my art for it and me noticing that Gwen is really pretty, prettier than me, and her gapped teeth are cuter than mine (some black girls get all the luck) and them hitting the Allo and them dealing the cards and Damon checking in on me and asking if I needed water like I was a plant and them telling me Rahim was going through a breakup and me joking about how he should start stalking her and me wondering when was the last time I sat in someone's, anyone's, MC Escher-inspired living room while listening to the Carti-satanic ambient glow of LIL JIGABOO's latest album, *SKIEEM*, feeling like I was back in middle school and Alysson, instead of making Damon pick up 20 cards as a punishment during the UNO round we're on, daring him to kiss me in front of everyone because it's "house rules" and him getting all flustered and me getting flustered and him rocking up to his knees and half-crawling over and me almost lapsing into delirium and him looking like he wants to kiss me and me not knowing what to do!!! it's been so long!!! and him coming closer, closer and !!! patting me on the back and saying "there" and me being so befuddled and imagining that if I were to write this I'd write it like a slapstick comedy where every time I played a card I had to bash my forehead against the ground but no one would notice even when the stream of blood flowing from my forehead verged on being fatal and half an hour later we're all UNO'd out and it's everyone having things to do tonight and tomorrow, like watching the latest season of *JoJo* and preparing for an internship thingy tomorrow and Damon offering to give me a tour of the rest of the house—*did I want to see the rest?*—and Alysson *woo*-ing and telling me she'd be right down the hall so don't be too loud and me being so confused before we go upstairs.

♀

Dainty—how I'd describe Damon's room. Fairy lights festooned above bed; Polaroids (friends, vacay spots, sunsets), keepsakes fixed along wire via clothespins. Standing beveled mirror in corner (more Polaroids taped to top

corners). Dried flowers on desk. White linens on bed. Two stuffies (orca and jellyfish). Minimalistic frame. So perfectly soft.

Walk over to bookshelf, as I do in the few people's rooms I get to go into. Rowling, Atwood, Green, Austen, Brontë, Okorafor (for/because of Gwen?), Gibran (Rahim?), Achebe, Sin, Peppernell—*Kaur*. Arranged by colour. Jesus.

Tease him that he has a bad bookshelf, but that most men do, and he laughs a bit and then excuses himself to use the washroom. Could use the adjoining one but chooses the one down the hall. Appreciated pre-hookup discretion.

Pick random book off shelf. *Ophelia Moment* by Romina Coeto. Dancing Cat Books, 2024. Bubble letter title. "Flat design" cover art style (forlorn-looking girl, attractive, with a ringlet of flowers on head, hand outstretched—lying on croissant bed). Hardcover—$30.00. NY Times Bestseller. Casey McQuiston calls it "Challenging, powerful, luminous...Compulsory reading for every modern girl on a mission." Dog-eared.

Put it back.

Study photos on wall: wild grass/flowers, other friends, drunk Alysson holding bottle of Fireball, *Mom & Dad*. Mom has his freckles. Looks late-40s, like a catcher's-mitt Damon, like all moms do compared to their children at this age. Try to imagine Mom younger. Dad doing neutral *take-the-picture-already* face dads do. A little short, but sturdy. Tradesman?

I picture meeting them.

What do you do, Savoy?

Loansharking. Extortion. Wandering around the city at night, disappointed with myself. The usual.

Oh...

Must be a way to not be ironic with parents. To shake a father's hand without the intention of biting his son. Other people manage just fine. Numbers decreasing rapidly, but *has* been done.

Try again:

> Take them to afternoon tea at...Fairmont. Mom's in well-fitting dress, has on best bracelet, earrings, necklace. Dad's in Calvin Klein suit (Winners)

that rarely sees light of day. Fidgets in his seat due to the restrictiveness. Damon in Italian tuxedo, silk lapel. Me: empire waist by Cara Cara—*toile de jouy*, sheer crochet lace. Or I'm in a tuxedo, too.

The four of us installed at one of the ballroom's tables. Mom doesn't know what to get. (*It's all so expensive! Are you sure you can afford this, Savoy?*) Tell her to get anything, everything. Dad doesn't normally do hoity-toity breakfasts—offer to get him something meatier. *Steak au... quelque chose*. Likes the idea: *Now this gal—who is most assuredly a girl and not an androgenous incubus—is thinkin'!*

An ebullient Damon, hand resting on my shoulder: "Have you told them about the property?"

"No, I haven't, honey. I was getting to that."

Mom: "What property? I didn't know you guys were looking?"

Damon: "It's very recent, what with Savi-wavi's recent promotion. We can't have a world-famous, socially adjusted botanist-artist-bodybuilder-Drake-assassin living in a two-bedroom apartment, now, can we?"

Squeeze-scrunches my shoulder with familiar tenderness.

Me: "We've been looking—just *looking* for now—at the new townhouses on York St. The Corbeau complex, it's called.

Dad: "A couple of the guys I know down at Mott Electric were brought in for those. Said they were done up real good. Good foundation 'n' all that—none a that 'cuttin' corners' shit."

Mom: "No foul language here, Dan."

Me: "I think we might be able to swing it if the interest rates—which I have a firm understanding of due to my impressive adult financial literacy, now that I no longer spend all my spare money on needless trinkets, like custom slug-themed mugs—stay put for a while."

Mom: "That's so exciting, you two! We'll throw you the nicest housewarming party—if you guys, get it, of course. I don't wanna jinx anything. But oh, that'd be so fun! Dan, do we still have the nice china in the garage? You didn't throw it away by mistake, did you?"

Me: "You already do plenty for us, Michelle. We'd be happy to have you just come by and see the place—if we get it."

Damon: "But we'll definitely let you host the baby shower."

Mom: "You *have* to let me do that. I'll make the *best* host."

Sunlight touching the tablecloth. Every server with infallible posture. Ambient Handel, not Playboi Carti vampire clones. The great spiritual buoyancy of refinement.

Another shoulder squeeze-unch from Damon. A lean-in kiss on the neck.

Michelle and Dan holding hands under the table.

Dan: "So, uh, I'm not too good with words or nothin', but, uh, I wanted to say that, uh—*we* wanted to say that we're real happy you and our son're—"

A creak.

Door opening. Reverie over. Damon's back, purged.

"Sorry to have left you in here for so long! I had to give Alysson something back, and then she started talking to me about this concert we're supposed to go to next week. Sorry. You must've been bored. What do you wanna do? Maybe watch a movie or show? Or do you have to go?"

"Sure. Yeah. No, it's cool. Let's watch something."

On the bed. Very far away from each other. The room is getter hotter, so hot. No way for me to open up my turtleneck to show off my tiny, misshapen boobs. (Men like that sort of thing, right? A few buttons undone, a submissive position, the suggestion of *breedability*?)

"Uhm," I start, lacing and unlacing my legs. "I'm not very good at this sort of thing."

He's setting up the first act of Netflix's *Female Warrior*. A show about women becoming contemporary gladiators. Twelve contestants, most of which are Crossfitters or fitness models with no combat training. Set in the Colosseum.

Him: "Not good at what?"

"Well, d-dates. I don't get asked out very often, so I'm not sure how to c-conduct myself."[26]

"Oh. Ohhhhh."

One of the contestants ends up tying herself up in her Roman net thing. (They clarify it's a *retiarius*.)

"Savoy," he soothes. "It's okay."

"Okay. Okay. I'll calm down. I'll be fun. I'll be chill and date-worthy."

He adjusts his collar. "See—that's the thing. I'm sorry you got the wrong impression. I was hoping to be friends. I'm...*ace*."

Oh. (🥲🥲🥲)

"So you mean...?"

He has the gall, after *all* we've done today, to tell me he doesn't like women. Or men. Or, *ermmm*...at least he doesn't *think* he does. Feminine boys are more his speed! Oh yes, it is all very tough to figure out. He's felt *off* his whole life because of it. He saw me on campus—with my piercings and my Deftones laptop sticker—and thought I might be like *him*. Different. Going through *similar hardships*!

"Oh my GOSH!" I say. "Wow. Ha ha. Wow. That's so cool. Yeah, I totally—I...You know..."

His expression is pure compassion as he apologizes for the misleading behaviour of his roommates, because they don't fully know about his status yet because he's been too self-conscious to tell them about it, or that he *doesn't really do love*...

"'Don't really *do* love'—yeah. No, I get it. Yeah. Heard that one before. Our, uh, g-generation's kinda like that, right? My theory is it's the toxins in the water. People are just kind of turning out weird."

"Oh." He turns the smart remote over in his hand. "Are you saying I'm... weird? I thought you would understand. Your pronouns are 'they/them' on the SFUBC Discord."

[26] Still have the last remnants of that fantasy cloying at my tongue. Why? I'm not even attracted to him. He's so...skinny? Weak-looking? Primitive as it sounds, if we were in a prehistoric era, he'd be bested in combat, and another healthier, fitter man would come into the room and tear off my clothes and take me away while the Netflix sludge played on in the background.

"OH! N-No—that's not what I meant." (It was.) "I was saying that we don't get a fair shot anymore 'cause there are so many endocrine disruptors around, and studies have shown those can" *(speeding up)* "adversely affect the sexual development of organisms. Y-You've probably seen the videos about the gay frogs. *We're* organisms, of course" (I'm sweating.) "So we've both kind of had that going on, *on top of* massive social changes and the rampant brand of individualism shoved down people's throats—you know, 'you're alone in the universe, you little speck! Entirely, completely alone—abandon your heritage!' and some people aren't really in t-tune with those ideas—older people, y'know?"

"Ah, I see. Yeah. You're probably right..."

In the background, one of the female contestants breaks her leg trying to climb an eight-foot stone wall.

I soldier on: "So, just to reiterate: I don't think you're weird. And that's great that you've found out that you're ace—or that y-you think so. I—ha ha—totally think we could do that studying you wanted to do sometime? I merely—I thought that because we were in your room, you were going to—anyway, yes. Studying. On campus. Wherever. Notes. Send me—an email when you need notes—I can give you—well, I'm not enrolled in anything at the moment, so—if you want—it's—"

"That's okay, Savoy. I appreciate the offer. I'll...let you know if I need any notes."

"'Kay."

"Amhhm."

Another girl falls off the wall and severely bruises her hip, warranting medical intervention.

"It's getting pretty late." I get up to limp out. "Where's the nearest bus station? I should—"

"If you turn right at the intersection heading east, there should be one not too far off."

"Okay. Yes. Thanks—*bud*."

7

Once Upon a Time in Savoyville

As I'm riding the rattly 007/R5/143/151 home through the patented West Coast blue-and-grey dreariness, I think:

> When men see me, they don't lapse into that romantic Freudian dichotomy of Madonnas and capital-W Whores. Instead, they seem to register only an outline, a silvery abstraction with a dollop of frizzy, spherical hair on top. I might as well be one of Modigliani's subjects—transfigured, frozen, only vaguely organic from the right angle. Sometimes I picture them seeing in me one of Junji Ito's spiral creatures, like in *Uzumaki*, or the anathematized silhouette Yozo draws of himself in Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* when trying to express his profound and unearthly incompatibility with human life.[27] In fact, one night, after having a teen boy half-hang his coat on my head during a train ride home (he later told me he "din' see [me] there"—that I "shoulda said som'"), I changed all of my profile pictures to a Wojak meme version of *NLH's* cover art and left them as that for over a year.

This kind of anonymity has followed me throughout my life. Janice and Winston, my beloved, tyrannical parents, moved me around every six months when I was growing up—sometimes, every three or four—so I spent most of my time in the introduction stage with people my age. Boys, specifically.

There I was—dressed up in baggy unisex thrift store ensembles and thrust in front of a class of skeptical elementary-schooler eyes and made to tell them three "very, very interesting" things about myself, or list my favourite colour, movie, and sport; or describe my highly disorganized, highly impoverished family unit. If it wasn't that, it was explaining why I looked like a slightly charred broccoli floret compared to my largely white (depending on the neighbourhood) and decidedly non-cruciferous classmates. Past a certain point, I got tired of coming up with new ways to deliver my spiel, so I memorized three quick-and-easy talking points: 1) My name was Savoy (pronounced "Sav-oi" 'cause I was French and fancy [I hadn't a clue at the time that my non-French, non-French-speaking parents had completely fucked up the pronunciation by anglicizing it from the traditional "Sav-wah."]); 2) Orlando Bloom was the most handsomest actor alive and my

[27] Some of us read that book *before* TikTok permanently ruined it.

super-duper favourite, especially in *Pirates of the Caribbean*; 3) I looked like broccoli because my dad was part veggie (in reality, just black).

In hindsight, the combination of these "facts" must have made me seem like a freak, or, at best, a certifiable weirdo, but to the 6-, 7-, and 8-year-old me's, the whole thing felt like a perfectly reasonable and balanced declaration of my person. The expectation was that the boys in my various classes at Clayton Heights Elementary, Prairie Rose Elementary, École Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary, College Park Elementary, Nelson Mandela Park Elementary, Et Cetera Elementary would *love* my cool facts and high-energy delivery. They didn't.

The problems with my contemporaries always began by the second week at a new school. At first, you had that glorious 7-day grace period where you were lavished with attention ("Where did you come from?"; "Have you heard of Neopets?"; "Is your dad really broccoli?"), and all your mistakes were forgiven on account of your not yet knowing the lay of the land. But as soon as day eight rolled around, the rose-tinted cereal-box 3D glasses came off, and you were expected to meet the standards and conventions of the class, like everyone else. The girls would realize by this point, given my answers to their many questions ("Uranus. Ha ha ha!"; "I think my JubJub died. I can't find him when I log on"; "He said he grew up in the jungle on an island and had a pet monkey, so he has to be broccoli"), and my small eccentric habits, such as drawing hairy arms and legs all over my Duo-Tangs, that they didn't want anything to do with me, so any hope of playing with them at lunch or pairing with them during in-class activities quickly evaporated. But the boys, who would laugh at my answers and sometimes argue with me about them, would end up taking me in around this time. I'd be wandering around the playground area, kicking at the rocks (older school) or wood chips (newer school), or spinning in circles until I got dizzy and fell down, and they'd call out to me, or send an envoy from the group to greet me. "Wanna play grounders with us?" they'd ask. They'd never see it but my little heart would light up like a glow pen, and I'd do my best to calmly respond yes.

Being ostracized by the girls was fine. It didn't bother me in the slightest that they wouldn't share their glitter with me, or their hair ties (not that they would have worked on me), or their Happy Bunny stickers. It didn't even bother me when they'd circulate rumours in the bathroom about my mom being a "drug person" or steal the felts with which I'd draw all those hairy appendages on my binders and worksheets. It didn't matter 'cause I'd be hangin' with my boys, building sledding ramps, eating sour Twizzlers 'til

we got sugar headaches, tying the "slow" kid's shoelaces together. (It was a different era.) These were inevitably the best days of my tenure at a school.

But, as is required of a life like mine, whenever something is going well, it must eventually be taken and hollowed out—or else, atomized into a thousand tiny child-sized particles.

The boys'd invariably find out through a teacher's stray comment, or the gendered language in one of the rumours, or my receiving a pink name tag—not a blue one—that my "cooool" partially heterochromatic eyes (dashes of green in one amid the brown), stout frame, disarming freckles, and broad nostrils and lips actually belonged to a *girl*, not a guy, as they had originally thought. They'd feel so cheated at this—that all along, hiding under the baggy, fourth-hand "Ecko Unltd" hoodie, frayed Walmart B.U.M. jeans, and the impossibly thick no-name glasses, was a filthy, icky female. Sometimes I'd even get so close to heaven as to be invited over to someone's house to play video games before this revelation would hit. Suddenly, in-class partners were scarce. After-school plans would cease. The grounders games were again off-limits. And I'd be left to resume my rock- and woodchip-kicking, my frantic spinning on the playground's edges as black blob, girl wraith.

There was only ever one exception to this rule during those years. At one of the "etc." schools, W. H. Day Elementary in Bradford, Ontario,[28] I became best friends with a boy in my fourth-grade class, Noah.

By all accounts, he was a chad in the making: You'd frequently hear the popular girls (in this case, Mandeep, Elizabeth, Nyla) muttering around the cubby hole about how funny Noah was, how he was nice and smart and good at running. Teachers would routinely show off his assignments to the class as exemplars. Usually, this sort of watermarking would inspire hatred among the other boys—rankling jealousy. But there was a tacit understanding that Noah *was* deserving of the praise. It also helped that he never once brought up his paragon status and did his utmost to seem like your average paste-swilling 2000s kid.

I'd again gone through my three-fact intro routine, which was by this time growing quite stale and ill-fitting for the collective maturity level. Many of the others had already turned nine and were looking toward being ten, and even though I was a little less developed, I could tell the crowds were getting tougher on my "baby humour." Consequently, at W. H. Day not even

[28] We'd been whisked off to Eastern Canada to be closer to Winston's half-sister, Victoria, who'd immigrated to Toronto a while prior from Trinidad and volunteered to temporarily assist with taking care of me.

the boys accepted me. I was ruthlessly alone from the jump. Our teacher, a Ms. Ivanov/Morozov/Bogdanoff or something similarly Slavic/Eastern European-y to my name, must have noticed my predicament, 'cause she let me skip regular gym class activities and play in the stage area (every aging school from that era had a theatre area that was mostly used for storage).

Sometimes I'd play with the hula hoops, stacking them 12 high and working my way through each. Other times I'd lie on the massive royal blue high jump pad and stare at the stained fiberglass ceiling tiles, lazily trying to find in them a pattern or key that might unlock a portal to—*somewhere*. Anywhere more exciting.

During my ninth or tenth session of fruitless tile-gazing, I felt a pressure change in the mat, followed by a "What're you looking at?" Noah had climbed on and was looking at me looking up.

"Err...uhhhh..." There was no point in lying. Everyone already thought I was a vegetable-kin freak. Could it get any worse? "I'm looking for secret messages and portals."

He didn't answer for a moment. I figured he was going to get off the mat and run over to tell the others what a fucking dork I was. "Sweet," he said. "Find any?"

"N-Not yet."[29]

"Can I help you try?"

"S-S-Sure. Wait."

"What?"

"You do know I'm a girl, right?"

He replied with remarkable equanimity: "Well, yeah. It's obvious, *Savwah*."[30]

The hands of the gymnasium's giant clock fell away, and for what felt like both seconds and ages, we traced patterns in the tiles, espying everything from aliens to YTV celebrities' faces. The whole time, I was conscious of the warmth of his T-shirted arm against my hoodie, to the point that I probably repeated my observations three times each before realizing what I'd said. Yet,

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[29] I was even more of a stuttering bonehead in those days. Happened any time I got nervous.

[30] He said my name the French way! 🥖🇫🇷

he didn't seem to care, and it was a marvel to see what he'd recognize in the forever-chemical tapestry above us. His imagination was effortless and varied.

Halfway through, I stopped looking at the tiles and snuck glances at his face. It was slightly avian like a lot of white people's faces, but his eyes weren't threatening and hawklike like those of scary-handsome guys—his softened at the edges, had a slightly negative canthal tilt, a look historically associated with wisdom and gentleness. Every movement and contour of his became aristocratic, that of a young, blue-eyed prince deigning to consort with the forest's most unfortunate frog. I couldn't help but wonder: did that m-mean he w-w-would eventually k-k-k-k-*kiss* me?

Ms. Slav interrupted my lowly frog fantasy by calling us back to class, but after that Noah and I hung out at school any chance we got. Because he was so popular, Noah was often whisked away to be the leader of lunchtime activities or class initiatives. He'd also disappear a few times a week for "challenge" classes where they taught students to play the xylophone or code websites for made-up animals. It got to the point where we had to orchestrate clandestine ten-minute meetings in the forest area behind the soccer field, or finish our worksheets extra fast and both ask to use the washroom at the same time so we could sneak away to our spot in the gym—or if a class was using the gym, sneak into the spare classroom they used for those challenge sessions. Ms. Slav caught on to our routine in time and banned us from going to the washroom simultaneously.

Every moment became a yearning. I'd stare at him in class, having heard that people could innately sense when they were being looked at, study every sandy brown strand of his hair's topography. Occasionally, he'd turn around and meet my gaze, offer a smile or a wink. This might very well have been the first manifestations of the kind of "blah, blah—I'm crazy now!" lovesick energy I later grew into, but in those days I had less of a conception of """"unhealthy""""" love. I thought love was pure devotion—a life-and-death sanctified in glitter. I still do. I would have died for him on command.

When he asked me one day if I'd like to hide in the cubby area and wait for the class and Ms. Slav to leave for lunch, the answer, from my synapses to my sinews, was yes. The plan went off without a hitch. We lingered while the other students got their snacks and then tucked ourselves into the cubby with the puffy bags and fall jackets.

It was a little eerie seeing the classroom so quiet and empty. Every classroom felt that way when it was uninhabited, like you'd awkwardly caught it sleeping naked.

Our homeroom wasn't anything special—white walls, adorned with posters of Albert Einstein, Malcolm X, and Eleanor Roosevelt quotes, underneath which hung our scrawly art projects (Canadian geese we'd messily coloured in—Noah's was perfectly done). The carpet was a knotted, churlish grey, stained hundreds of times over. The bookshelves added a splash of light brown to the mix but little more. Shit was "basic af."

The only two remarkable things the room had were our class pet enclosures. Set in the corner near the teacher's desk was a gerbil cage, housing Chloe, our class mascot, who'd recently given birth to six colourpoint-black gerbil pups. Not far down, on top of one of the waist-height bookcases lining the wall, was a 100-gallon fish tank we were using to spawn salmon to be released into a local river as part of a district-sponsored environmental restoration campaign ("U-Spawn"). Ms. Slav had told us about a dozen times during the biology lesson on the life cycles of fish not to touch the tank, in case it broke or the salmon eggs grew too disturbed to hatch. Jack M., a rather dopey kid who ate his own boogers while completing worksheets, had once tried to put a pizza crust in the tank and was hauled off to the principal's office and given a permanent record pink slip. After that, no one had tried anything, and now that the hundreds of salmon had hatched and were ready to be released, they mostly swam around the barren tank *ad infinitum,* bumping into one another. I knew how they felt.

"Do you think they get tired of that?" Noah asked.

"Yeah. Even I would," I replied. "They probably want to be free to do salmon things."

"It's sad. We get our freedom, but they have to sit in this tank and wait to be dumped in the river, where they'll have to swim upstream just to lay their eggs and die!"

"Didn't Ms. [Slav] say that they live from two to six years? That's good for a fish!"

"That's not long enough, Savoy. Every plant and animal should get at least 100 years on Earth. We get to enjoy books, shows, games—and they get to see none of it."

"I'm not sure the salmon would be very good at tetherball or *Super Smash*."[31]

[31] Why was I brushing off his ideas? I loved every little syllable that came out of Noah's mouth. He could have told me in that moment he wanted to become a salmon himself and I would have dutifully obliged.

"No, I mean...I want them to live more before they..." Something was calling out to him, but I still don't know what, despite how many times I've poured over this conversation in my head. I'd never seen him so distraught.[32] "You look distraught," I said, trying to sound as smart as him.

"It's nothing."

"Do you wanna hold one?" I asked. "They've already hatched, so we can't hurt them now."

He paused and looked at me, mulling over something far greater than how a baby fish would feel in-hand. "Okay."

Ms. S. kept the maintenance kit and the skimming tools right near the tank, so it wasn't hard to find what we needed. To show Noah how cool and daring I thought I was, I took the lid cover off, and, mustering as much gall as I could, held the skimmer aloft over the whirling clusters of hatchlings. It took a few swipes to snag a medium-sized one after pinning it against the side of the tank.

"Hold out your hands," I said.

As I went to drop it in his cupped hands, we noticed how hard it was thrashing and flailing, its wriggling iridescence resembling a silver metal shaving. A bullet.

"Savoy, we—shouldn'—"

"Just for a second. I'll put him right back in after."

Noah placed his hands above and below the skimmer's mesh and, with the most tender stroke, palpated its burgeoning scales. "It feels like a wet Push Pop," he said. "Or a tombstone." The fish's eyes bulged at us with panicked incredulity. "Let's release it," he said finally. "I want him to live a full life."

"We're not near a river. Maybe we could use the drain? That goes to the ocean, right?" We walked over to the sink near the entrance. "I think you could fit it through the holes." (The sink had a strainer. That crude slotted steel one they all had.)

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[32] Side note: We read Lois Lowry's *The Giver* that year (half of us didn't understand it in the slightest), and there's a scene where Jonah stares at salmon hatchlings before he's endowed his role as a Receiver. Lowry uses the word *distraught* to describe Jonah's conflicted emotions, so I thought, with my limited ability to make inferences, that being "distraught" meant you were preoccupied with looking at salmon.

"Mmm..."

Again, I couldn't track what he was thinking.

"We shouldn't. Those pipes connect to a water treatment plant."

He was right. I hadn't given a damn about the watersheds or weather cycles, but Prince Noah had soaked it all up during the water unit. He knew everything.

He continued: "I know—I'll use one of those sewers with the yellow fish symbol above it. There's one by the wooden playground. He can use the drainage pipes to swim to the ocean and be free."

"Wait. Dip it back in the water before you take it out. It's probably thirsty."

He dipped it in. "I'll be back in a couple minutes. You hide in case anyone comes back!"

As he left and I made for the cubby, ready to sit for a while amid the puffy jackets, I detected some stirring in Chloe's cage.

I'd felt too anxious to approach her since arriving at Day Elementary, because so many of my classmates had glommed on to her with the kind of ferocity reserved for toddlers or Pakistani K-Pop stans. If anyone so much as bumped the bookshelf she was on, a large-scale skirmish would break out. It was hard to picture what they might do to an outcast like me if they saw me tickling her or feeding her extra lettuce chunks.

Up close, she looked like a hairy black-and-white ball of Play-Doh (v relatable), if you stuck googly eyes on it and gave it matchstick teeth. I'd only ever seen mice and rats while playing in the alley near our old apartment in Regina, so it was kinda perturbing to see a rodent that had been so well cared for. She was lying on her side, on a small mound of corncob shavings, claws wrapped lightly around her young, who were nursing. All the babies ever seemed to do since their birth was feed. (Principal Koontz—odd man; liked rodents—his idea to give each class a pet—was the one who presided over the process the week prior and didn't allow us to see the birth, despite how many of us asked). The pups had that vulnerable, downy-skinned appearance you see in the faces of jarred pig fetuses that've been cursed to a Walt Disney death-suspension in formaldehyde. They squealed—it sounded like oinking—as I approached. A half-eaten lettuce leaf lay wedged in the shavings near Chloe's face.

Why don't I do something nice for you, Chloe, since I'm probably not going to have the chance to get anywhere near you again any time soon? Is this wittew weafy bothering you?

Undoing the latch with one hand, I snaked the other in as slowly and delicately as possible, so as not to disturb the rodent breastmilk barbeque. I tried feeding the piece to Chloe to give her more strength, but she ignored the offer. Noah was probably going to be irate with me when he got back. I never wanted to see him mad. *Never*. Though, we had already taken the ultimate leap in touching the fish after repeatedly being warned *not* to. But only Principal Koontz had warned us not to touch Chloe or her young—and his warning wasn't that stern. What did new life feel like in this form? Was their fur as soft as it looked, like the underside of a kitten or a new blanket before you washed its soul out?

My fingers relinquished the lettuce shard and roved toward Chloe's stomach. The temptation was too much. Touching one of the pups on the far end would surely be safe? With a slight tremble, I allowed the pad of my index finger stroke the belly of the pup furthest from Chloe's head. It let out the most adorable squeak. One more. This pup felt a smidge denser, hairier, firmer under finger. It didn't squeal when I touched it.

Before Noah returned, I locked the cage (the *gerbilarium,* as Ms. S. insisted upon referring to it as), disposed of the lettuce, and installed myself in the shade of the cubby we had first hid in.

I re-emerged into the fluorescent light when he reappeared.

"I did it," My Prince proclaimed. "I did it."

"Awesome! You did it!"

"I waited until no one was around and released Jacques into the drain."

"Jacques?"

"I gave him a French name—kinda like yours. For good luck." I could have passed away right then and there. The honour! "We should probably get out there. People are starting to ask where we are. Did you put the lid back on the tank and the skimmer wand where it was before?"

I nodded and he started peeking through the entrance, looking for an escape opportunity.

"I don't see anyone. We can make a break for it. Let's g—"

"Noah, wait. Do you wanna see Chloe's pups? While you have the chance."

"What?"

"While you were gone, I opened the cage and removed some of the lettuce that was going bad."

Noah's eyes grew bewildered.

"No, no, Savoy. You didn't touch Chloe, did you?"

"Nope."

"Thank God."

"But I did touch two of the pups."

"Oh no! I should have said something."

My vision was turning watery.

"W-W-Wait. I—"

"You weren't here that day." (Mom often pulled me from school for "extracurriculars...") "They told us about the pups. Oh—I really should have told you. I thought Ms. [Slav] had already."

"N-N-Noah. Wait. What did I-I—?"

"There's no going back now." His expression looked so downcast. "Let's go, Savoy."

♀

The following morning, with the grace of a silvery autumn light streaming in through the classroom windows, all 27 students in Ms. S.'s Grade 4 class found out what happens if you touch a gerbil's pups too soon. Nyla D. (ponytailed Samoan bitch who often stole my cheese-flavoured Ritz) was the first to spot the bloodstain Ms. S. forgot to wipe from the wall of Chloe's corner. And conspicuously missing from the room were the gerbilarium, Chloe herself, and her young. Nyla issued a shriek, alerting the class to the stain. All I could do was look at Noah, who brought his hand to his forehead and glanced downward.

There exists a tone—you know the one—that teachers take when they know they've permitted something egregious to happen on their watch—a student

cracking open his skull on the slide during recess, a song being played that's far too mature for the children's amenable ears, an already suspected teacher with "handsy" tendencies (Mr. Adelstein-Dombrowski) having a go at the naive, be-hymened burnt-broccoli girl while helping her change out of a Christmas concert costume (she was dressed as Blitzen, one of the least liked of Santa's reindeers), in an event that might irrevocably alter her trust in men and her sexual persona going forward. In this case, Ms. S. had to interrupt our regularly scheduled quick-write activity to tell us in that jilted tone that someone made contact with Chloe's pups and Chloe got confused, perceived the pups as foreign entities, and ate them whole in a frenzied, cannibalistic rage.[33]

From beyond the sea of sputtering children, Ms. S. sought it fit to ask: "Is there anyone here who knows what might have happened to Chloe? You'll receive no punishment for speaking up. You can come talk to me during recess, lunch, or after school." I was having a near seizure at this. Lesions were developing along my brain's cortices.

Silence.

A shame like this should feel eternal.

Then: "I do," came that sparkling, pained voice from seat 5D on the seating chart, the only seat that ever mattered. "I did it."

If you thought Nyla's cretinous bark was bad, you should have heard mine.

"During recess, I hung back to get something from my bag and heard a noise coming from Chloe's cage. She couldn't get to the piece of lettuce while her pups were nursing, so I thought I'd help her because she looked very hungry, and so I reached in and unwedged the lettuce and tried to give it to her, but when I did, she bit me. I pulled my hand back at a weird angle, and I think I touched the pups."

Thus sounds the angel falling to earth.

Ms. S. was taken aback; that it would have been the class golden child! She gave us a free reading block and pulled Noah out into the hall to get

[33] She didn't word it this way, but to me, her "Chloe rejected two of her young and they passed away—it happens often in the animal kingdom!" meant the exact same thing. I'd been left alone to watch TV enough nights to have seen on *Animal Planet* what really happens when mothers reject their young. More than that, though, the undefinable terror in Noah's expression the day before had all but confirmed the pups' demise.

the full story. I was so ill I vomited Oreo O's cereal (a distinct rarity in the Matviyenko/Marcelle household, where a breakfast of plain Villagio toast was the standard) directly onto my desk and excused myself. No one was present enough to care. I didn't make eye contact with Noah in the hallway.

During the three days I stayed home from school with a "head-tummy-arm" flu after the incident, I tried dunking my head in my bathwater over and over, testing how long I could hold my breath, in the hopes of learning how long it would take to drown myself if needed. Eventually, my grandparents—who'd flown in to help my overworked Aunt Victoria watch me 'cause my parents had gone off to Whereverthefuckville again—told me to go back to school when they noticed I had no fever, no cough, and no sore arm.

I waited until lunch to confront Noah, pulling him by the hand all the way to our favourite spot in the forest, near the red currant bush. "Why'd you do that, Noah? It wasn't your fault."

"I know how you are with these things.[34] You didn't know better. No one ever told you."

"It's Ms. S.'s fault. She kinda sucks."

"It was my idea to sneak away in the first place. It's my fault."

It was a crackling, austere afternoon. Freezing, by all accounts. Our teeth were starting to chitter slightly. His right index finger had a *Beauty and the Beast* Band-Aid on it. I'd spotted it earlier while pulling him.

"W-What happened to your finger?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing."

I grabbed his hand and brought it to my chin so I could look at it from under my glasses. (N e a r - s i g h t e d g a n g.) "Did you hurt it?"

"No—not really. I—"

"Then take it off."

"I poked it—with my pencil."

"Why?"

"So it would look like Chloe bit me. I thought Ms. S. might check."

[34] He was politely calling me a fucking retard—and deservedly so.

Oh, My Prince. My wondrous, crafty, selfless prince.

"You didn't have to."

"I did, okay? So just stop."

The leaves, frost-tipped and sarcophagized in the shade, cracked beneath our boots.

Every second he paused, a muscle in me collapsed in on itself.

"Are we still friends?"

"Yeah," he smiled through clattering teeth. "Always." (😳 😳 😳) "But I gotta go meet Brett and Jaeheon before they come looking, okay? You can come, but I know you don't like those guys because they steal your sandwiches."

"It's fine—I've got a new fort to build. This time, I want it to be a triple-decker!"

"Use the spruce branches. They're stronger than the dead sugar maple ones."

"Okay!"

"See you, Savoy."

"See you."

Fifteen minutes later, a lunch supervisor found me as I was stacking spruce branches and told me to come to the office because Janice was there to pick me up. And there Janice was, bundled up in faux-designer coating, smelling of John Players—"Get your stuff—we're going back home," was all she said.

As we walked toward the bus stop, we passed by the sewer grate near the wooden playground. It was difficult to see because the water in the drain had mostly frozen over, but even with my faulty eyes, I thought I saw the motionless outline of Jacques the fish, glowing, despite itself, from under the ice.

We moved back to Edmonton that night.

8

Have you ever noticed that when you get off the bus/train/Charon's raft, nothing happens? Everyone carries on?

9

Oppa 80HD Style

It's easier than it's ever been to float through one's life.

When *else* in human history could a 23-decimal-decimal-decimal-year-old ADHD-riddled mulatto wonderchild wander from comedy show to café, inlet to art gallery, frittering away her fertile years, phone in hand, without so much as a pip from concerned family or community?

Boys like Damon (hasn't messaged me since that night) are without their initiation rituals—they have no bulls to kill, no mountains to summit, no oaths to swear (initiation rituals conducted virtually through a PS5 game don't count, and watching someone else do it on YouTube doesn't count either, bub). So they stay boys, mentally. Physically, if you've noticed, too. But, unlike my Crystal Cafe counterparts (I'm currently in a thread about history's most destructive men, with Hitler and Stalin battling it out as always, and Morrissey a close third), I don't *hate* men. Well, most of the time.

At this point, I might understand men better than I do women. When I used to frequent 4chan post-Tumblr and consort with the so-called "alt-right trollz" of the world, it felt like playing with the boys in elementary school. I'd watch them squabble about international politics (Hitler was given a much more generous treatment there than on Tumblr), social issues of an entirely wilder nature (re-segregation was a perennial topic), or just shoot the shit about ridiculous things. They introduced me to conspiracy theories of all kinds. (*Huge* fan! 👽 🛸 🧿)

I was there for the tail-end of the site's glory days, to hear the stories of old—when 4chan could mobilize as a group to fuck with major corporations and political leaders. "Weaponized autism" was the term in those days. Tracking down flight paths, raiding online contests (who could forget the time we banded together to get Taylor Swift [🤦🏾‍♀️] to play at a school for the deaf?)—

in this way, the "anons" on 4chan were unmatched. They might've been trying to make me an e B il Nazi in between calling me a nigger and asking to see my tits if I so much as hinted at being female. But did it matter if I became one? Who was paying attention? (I never showed them my tits, as I am a theydy with decency!)

But as with Tumblr, things on 4chan soured. Instead of telling stories about incest and planning comedic initiatives or leaking fake documents to the Michael Avenatti types in *F U, establishment* campaigns, the users fell into culture-war trench fighting, the Pepe economy collapsed, and casual "lurkers" like me, who enjoyed reading at least some of the insanity taking place on the boards, were driven away. Thus, I made my exodus to the land of Kaur-esque milk and honey that is the femoid ("foid," if you'd rather the shorthand) Mecca, Crystal Cafe.

CC's interface is almost a direct copy of 4chan, with an imageboard skeleton supporting different "boards" or areas on which you can anonymously start or participate in themed discussions. In other words, it's a forum where you can choose to respond with text and/or images.[35] If 4chan is the boy equivalent (most of us found CC through a banner ad that was posted on 4chan's incel containment board, "/r9k/"), we're the girl equivalent, with fewer themed board options—seven. Most of the action takes place on "Random" ("/b/"), and "Feels" ("/feels/"), where you can vent or ask other mentally ill users for life advice. I spend most of my time on these two.

We have several rules on these boards—no fetish content, no asking about how to get a girlfriend or boyfriend. Absolutely no child porn (we're freaks, not monsters). And the CC cardinal rule: No males ("moids") allowed. This is stressed in all areas of the site.

Despite the vitriolic hatred of men and 4chan anons on Crystal Cafe, we users suffer from the same existential problem as the channers. We've also missed our call to action. As un-fuckable women, social cretins, botched debutantes, we failed our subtle, unspoken, "easier" feminine initiation rituals. There is no killing of the proverbial bull for the modern woman. There's brunch WITH THE GALS! 🥞 🐣 SOS There's letting yourself get plowed by your unskilled lover in the back of his parents' Bronco. There's going to a technical college to become a nurse and torment the elderly and the ugly. There're marathon outlet shopping trips. There's growing pubic hair, but not *too much* pubic hair. If you fail too many of these events in succession,

[35] Including images helps garner more responses to your contributions, which show up as "(You)s." Feels good to get as many as possible.

you relinquish your capacity to be seen as a functionable, fuckable woman deserving of a busy (or layabout) man's attention and precious resources. You're done.

As mentioned, unlike most of the other users, I don't hate moids. Not *fully*. What I hate about most men is their unfeelingness. The arrogance is fine. The gaming is fine. The perma-coating of sweat and BO is fine.[36] What I can't forgive is the disregard toward matters of emotion. You can dump men, steal their child, light their messy home on fire, and they shrug and ask about the latest sports-betting odds, or if you have any good parlay ideas. This, to me, is an inhuman way to live. The male lifestyle is a tragedy of *incompassion*.

The men who do *get it* get it so well they're untouchable. They've cracked the code and can show emotion, show that they care. These also happen to be the men, the beautiful ones, the gifted ones, who move the world, who make foids like me and women on the whole look like low-IQ children, livestock. These men might make up 2% of the ones active today. And maybe there's an extra 5% that are neutral—just *okay*.

In this thread (I'm wandering on the backroads of Kitsilano, on my phone, maybe roaming around Avery's general neighbourhood, thinking about going through his garbage for a used shirt to smell =)), one user writes that she found out her e-boyfriend was cheating on her with a Stacy from his e-sports club. She's posted his full name and a picture of him that's been lit on fire. I'll let it go today. I only participate in doxxing operations now if they're extra juicy.

10

Nightwalker, Slugmaster

For anyone with insomnia, night walks are a rite of passage. If you're a real one, and not some faker, you'll sense a cosmic pull—an impulse that draws you to roam around with the owls and the crackheads and the stars that look more like asterisks upon mankind's balance sheet. These night walks rarely bring peace, but they're something. Light assuagements, gentle atrocities.

Some of my fellow limbo-mates choose to roam anywhere. Others work fixed circuits. Some rock headphones. Others bareback it. But we're out here,

[36] How are their armpits *always* smelly, whether they shower twice a week or twice a day?

crawling out of every imaginable crevice as soon as midnight hits (and usually too shyly or autistically to talk to one another when we do spot other cursed souls).

Me? I've got a bit of girl autism and boy autism, so I mix it up. Most of the time, I'll rove around the city, peeking in stores I don't have enough money to shop in, observing strangers as they deliver Don's to lazy Millennials who can't walk down to the street to pick it up themselves, or as they go through garbage cans or chat in the streets. Maybe opt for something more scenic, like a trip around the inlet in the inviting blackness of the forest. Maybe take a dip in the murky, polluted water (clothes on) if I'm down really bad, to rehearse my departure from this world.

Other times, I'll choose a sports field or train tracks and pace back and forth while working my way through a new playlist (this time I burn through "Shinji (she/her) arc" [anime OST and citypop], "how do you kiss with that? (JUMPSCARE: ROMANTIC DELUSION)" [cloying Men I Trust-type softgirl shit], and "Going Full Retard .// it come wid egg woh" [meme music/ Russian doomer bops/experimental garbage from the backrooms of Spotify]).

I found my darling Sisyphuses 🐛🐛🐛, who've been with me for five months now, during one of my night walks. They came from the train tracks near Burrard Inlet. They had managed to work themselves over to the track from the neighbouring brush, but when I found them, three other slugs (whom I assumed were from their tribe or were siblings) had been sliced in half by a passing train. And there they were, my Sisyphuses, trying to make sense of the carnage of their comrades, with nowhere to go but back to the brush, where every manner of predator, fiend, and slug-hating ghoul lay, or to try to brave life on the tracks together.

I watched them for 20 minutes. They wouldn't leave their dead friends behind. It seemed so cruel to let them stay on the tracks, knowing that another needless train carrying industrial chemicals or potash would probably come by soon. So I scooped them up and brought them home.

At first, they lived in a big bowl I once used for baking (I lined it with sticks and dirt and moss and anything else that looked appealing to slugs [borrowed from the backyard of Mr. Chang, my Chungwa-cigarette smoking, karaoke-singing landlord]) until I could get a proper terrarium for them off Facebook Marketplace.

I researched how to properly care for wild slugs. Turns out they eat a wide variety of things—algae, insects, fungi. And they have feet, tentacles and

weird add-ons, like pneumostomes (breathing pores). Mine were teenagers at the time (they only live about 1-2 years, unless well-cared for), so they were medium-sized and spunky. More digging revealed that they were black slugs. Black slugs—despite their unimaginative name—can be black, brown, or, in rare cases, white. The more I researched and learned about them, the more I realized we had a lot in common.

Generally, they putter around the enclosure and get their slime on everything. Sisyphus 1 is *cool like that* and clings to the ceiling for most of the day.[37] Sisyphus 2 is a moss-hound gourmand guy—so much so that I routinely have to go collect more in the backyard for him. Sisyphus 3, the moody intellectual of the bunch, tends to slink around and ruminate upon the many facets of life (you can tell he's thinking when he stops what he's doing and his antennae begin to flicker). For fun, I added a plastic ball to roll up the hill I built for them in the back left corner.

Anyone who says insects or animals don't have personalities—those crass, small-minded dorks I'd see commenting on IG animal rescue videos—should be put up against the wall. And I should get the first shot.

11

Create Your Character

The pronoun thing from the Damon conversation from earlier requires some explanation. Yes—I use "they/them" pronouns, like *everyone else* these days. As a mask. It's easier this way. People stop asking questions. And yes, I have them listed officially on my Discord and when participating in the SFUBC channel (Student #312231865! Never going back!)

If you want a better sense of what I'm workin' with, here's the current stat sheet:

> Name: "Sigma" Savoy Matviyenko (they/them or she/her) (Mother's surname for...reasons unexplained...)
>
> Hometown: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
>
> Birthday: May 20, 2000

[37] There are only minor visual differences between them: Sisyphus 1 is the darkest, Sisyphus 2 is the smallest, and Sisyphus 3 has a faint scar running along his dorsal side. From the right angles, they all resemble Steve Buscemi—respectfully.

Height: 5'3.568" (secretly 9 feet)

Weight: lol—not as fat as I used to be

Astrological Sign: Leo (You already knew this)

Social Insurance Number: 542 666 XXX

Sexual Orientation: ???/Loves big, grass-fed beef boys/goth girls/non-Stacy women

Major: Sciences

Body: Hairy, Muscular

Ethnicity: Mixed (50% Afro-Trinidadian/25% Irish/24.9% Ukrainian/0.1% Dawg)

Economic Status: Perilous

Preferred Username: "SigmaxSavoy (active), BiffThiccie (retired), SavoyAhoy:) (retired), KillerSmurfette619 (retired)

Special Perks: "Broken" (Adds +5 to Humour); "Sleepless" (Can stay up for 60 hours straight if needed) "Skelly Mode" (Can starve themself/herself indefinitely if Emotional Turmoil character is present); "Pattern-Oriented/Super-Autism" (Will detect and generate patterns within and for other characters) "Sooo Lonely" (Boosts tolerance to inhumane levels of isolation)

Special Abilities: Makes a mean coffee; Good at drawing porn; Writes funny thread replies; Can binge-watch anything without moving; CWAZINESS; ??????

Weaknesses: Wouldn't you like to know, bub! (I'll tell you if you hold my hand 😗)

12
Dax Attack

Today's commission:

> Mikasa from *Attack on Titan* eating spaghetti at a round table with three Minions from *Despicable Me;* Eren Yeager watching in the background yearningly. Requested style: Noir.

I *wanted* to focus on my commissioned works, but I couldn't stop drawing Avery. As cliché as it sounds, every time I closed my eyes, I saw his features as if they were etched into my retinas. I tried to pull myself back by searching for Minion reference pictures, but I'd absent-mindedly gone through so many that I'd arrived at Facebook boomer memes of them, where the skinny Minion was talking about killing some dude's wife for him, or one of the fat ones was celebrating the fifth birthday of someone's three-legged Chihuahua named "Despacito."

I'd drawn him 50 times already since yesterday. Not even watching movies or anime about big-breasted girls dropped into historical military battles could keep me from it.

The situation was rapidly spiraling. The panic episodes were getting worse. Something loud and visceral from deep within demanded to be heard.

I needed to avail myself of the one ever-present, guaranteed distraction in my life.[38] So I knocked on Dax's door, preparing to dip into the muck of his room. Soon came the clattering of dishes and an indiscriminate groan not worth inquiring about. The smell was what you'd expect. He'd almost finished eating the remains of my Don Rickles burger from too many days prior. On his curved gaming monitor was the pause menu for *Final Fantasy.* So many smells. But no bimbo on the bed. Small blessings.

Dax was wearing a pair of black sweatpants we've come to refer to as "Fatman Pants" because they make him look 20 pounds heavier than he is, which is already too heavy. When he wears these, one might envision roasting him over a fire like a stuck pig and harvesting the meat and juices to feed the poor. But no—we weren't roasting him tonight. I wanted to try—one *last* time—so that he could sprout wings, lose the pants, and become the pudgy cherubim destiny so requires of him.

[38] Earlier in the night, I resolved to give him one last chance—or else I'd choke him to death in his sleep and expedite his trip back to the unknown.

I complained to him about not being able to focus, of having tried everything—coffee, dex, lying with my feet in the air to get a *phat* headrush. Would we want to play some co-op to help me get my mind off things?

"Eeeiiiuuu[39]...Bet," he said.

We reminisced about the last game we'd played together—*Overcooked 2*—and how much trouble we'd had completing. How we had to borrow an extra controller from his much handsomer brother, Jack. I reminded Dax to take his insulin because his speech was so slurred and filled with "eiuughhhh" sounds that he seemed bonked up.

At first, he wanted me to watch him play *FF*, 'cause he was "super close to getting the 'Fierce Tyrant's Attire Coffer' from this Battle Pass. [His] Series Malmstones [were] at Level 24." But this sounded awful, so he instead looked in his "*gay*ming library" for something more suitable for a hangout and settled on *Life Is Strange*.[40]

The game is about an artsy time-manipulating teenage girl at a fancy academy in Oregon. Dax had already made it through a bit of the opening act, so we picked up at the point where Max is saved from the harassment of the preppy bully kid, Nathan (whom everyone suspects is behind the recent disappearances of girls in the area), by her old childhood friend (no thanks to Warren, the timid love interest), who used to be a bright, winsome soul but is now a stoner goth chick (Chloe). They (we) drove away in the Chloe's beat-up pickup truck, and it was cool.

The main playstyle of the game is centered around laid-back investigation, with choose-your-ending major decisions mixed in, so, of course, when we got to Chloe's room, Dax spent a good amount of time seeing if he could find any of her undergarments. He couldn't, but we instead got to change Max's outfit. (Massive sapphic vibes from Chloe during this 👩‍❤️‍👩.)

We elected to do a playthrough where we make the worst decisions possible to try to get the "bad" ending. So when we "accidentally" broke Chloe's snow globe in her room, we didn't rewind to fix it. And when Chloe's stepfather, David, came in asking whether or not she's been smoking weed, we violated Chloe's trust and got her in more trouble.

Around this point, Dax told me I seemed "happier, vro," instead of, "like, kinna pissed."

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[39] That, and its variations, is his iconic thinking noise.

[40] The whole time I watched him pull at long strands of unwashed hair and pile them on the edge of his desk. If you wanna picture his face some more in your brain compartment: It's very frog-like. Bulgy eyes, puffy. That of a human CJ Frog.

I didn't know how to articulate the real state I was in, that there's this constant maelstrom following me around, an invisible plague interfering with every attempt I make at living well. That I could turn to smithereens in this basement and no one would notice—I wouldn't get so much as a *wellness check*. But instead I said "yeah" and asked him about Nevaeh (he won't be seeing her again because she likes crocheting—this is a deal-breaker to him).

Dax asked how things had gone with Damon. I give him the précis while picking at the peeling leather of his gaming chair. As he virtually fiddled around in Chloe's house, I confessed to him that I was in love with someone and had been for a few weeks, but that I knew I'd never be good enough for him, because I wasn't even good enough for a guy like Damon. When I asked him if he'd ever been in love, his exact response was: "Uhhhh...naw, dawg. I dun really think about love, y'know?" He blamed it on the dating apps.

I asked him if I should approach Avery, or were men the ones who wanted to do the approaching? Would I be scaring him? His response to this: "Doo, guys luh that sort of thing. Truuust. I wish more girls'd do thatta me. Would save me a lot of time. If they'd tell you they wanted to bang and stuff. Man, thaha be sweet."

I asked him if he thought it was weird I'd been drawing Avery incessantly.

"You're pretty good at drawing: You drew thuh YouTube thumbnail pic for my channel. And the naked Cammy for my spank bank." Classic. (Helpful?)

But he thanked me when I reminded him to take his insulin again and wanted to know if I was going to be making an appearance at the club tomorrow. I said probably, because life was strange like that.

13

Funny (Wo)man

I do indeed visit Dick Falino's Semen Palisade the next night.

It's either this, the standard rotting routine, or an endless fawning over Avery in the shade of anonymity, in the basement. I need time to craft an approach for making contact with him, and need some entertainment while doing it. (Still haven't finished that *AoT* commission, so I've brought my iPad to the theatre to work while the comedians do their thing.)

The nightly food special—it's Thursday—is the usual: "Wanda Sykes Chicken Strips." Not as exciting as the "Don Rickles' Pickles Burger"—it's

literally five chicken strips, fries, and your choice of dipping sauce. I get mine with a special spicy sauce that isn't an on-menu option (mayo mixed with sriracha—I've watched Matt prepare it several times).

I'm lucky enough to have Dax be my server tonight, since he appears to be needed beyond his regular host duties.[41]

"I'll get Matt to give you an extra strip or two, vro," Dax says.

"Sweet. By the way, who's the headliner tonight?"

"Uhhh...some woman from...eiiguhuigh...somewhere in the States."

"Nice. Should be *fun*."

"Aight, lemme go put in yer order. And, vro, maybe don't be heckling too much like you did last time. Matt and L'Marr were laughing about it, but Dick gets kinna choked."[42]

If one were trying to devise an ingenious torture method for causing an enemy—or "opp"—as much discomfort as possible, such torture would undoubtedly involve having to listen to lower-level female comedians perform their acts. There is precious little on whichever-deity-you-subscribe-to's green earth worse than that. Why?

The female comedian's act boils down to one—maybe two—of four things: 1) Muh pussy ("Any ladies in the crowd here tonight? Yeah? How many of you have had a really nasty period? Any cramping going on *right now?* Like, *RIGHT NOW?* Ha ha!"); 2) Men r, liek, so stoppiid! ("Have you ever noticed how men go buy thing at Home Depot and be liek, 'sportsball on, babe' and then leave thing bott a round house to make evun biggar mess??? Caveman!"); 3) Muh pussy take dick (V2) ("I was once with this guy—very, erm, *well*-endowed, if you know what I mean! Wink, wink. I couldn't walk right for *weeks* after our sessions. Trouble is, he had this funny eye thing he did wherever we banged...It would, like, drift a little. Like, 'where are you

[41] They're short-staffed again because—and you don't really need to know this, but it's juicy—Simona, another one of Dax's casualties, is now pregnant (not his—he eats too many processed foods to be fertile) after having another workplace affair with another coworker. Only she's engaged to Felix, one of the servers I sometimes see on Tuesdays, and now they're unsure of whose baby it is. So she takes nights off when she isn't feeling well. Poor girl...(*womp womp*).

[42] I've never properly spoken to Dick. He was a comedian back in the day and found okay levels of success. I've seen a few videos of his sets online. He always, without fail, opened with a line about the lights in whatever venue he was in being so bright he could see his ancestors. You've gotta admire the dedication to the bit.

going, little eye guy? Your master is so hot! Even if he *could* be in a higher income bracket. Come back!'"); 4) Feminism/social justice. ("Don't you think it's kinda fucked up we did slavery. I mean, when you think about it??? *Slavery*. And we women couldn't stop it, because our husbands told us no??? And we just accepted that??? If it had been me back then, it'd've gone down like this..." **bopping noises on the mic**; **uncoordinated motions of hitting someone**)

Every. Fucking. Time. (🙀)

They can't even get misandry right.

Worse still, they follow a select few archetypes: The ones who enjoy being downright gross and vulgar with their details draw on Amy Schumer (this doubles as Leslie Jones if they're black). The ones who wanna seem aggressive ape Sarah Silverman. The ones who wanna seem quirky parrot Kate McKinnon (most are also gay like McKinnon). The ones who bank on apathy and "over it"-ness mimic Aubrey Plaza. The ones who feel like talking about "ISSUES ✊🏿🏳️‍🌈🦃" affect their best Hannah Gadsby (this doubles as our beloved Wanda Sykes, who bravely gave her life to become chicken strips, if they're both black *and* gay). And the rest do a nebulous Amy Poehler impression, thinking that they're channeling the better half of that comedy duo, Tina Fay, who, thank the heavens, has the good sense not to do watered-down stand-up anymore.

And thus, wayward souls like me, and the rest of the crowd, about 15-deep again tonight, are subjected to this anima-withering dreck every time one of these so-called *up-and-comers* stops by.

The opener: a diminutive redhead from "'round these parts, y'all" (the MC, Yngali, a girl Dax says is secretly dealing stolen molly to the DF staff on the low, sounds like a Southeast Asian/cowgirl hybrid when introducing acts. I think I'm subconsciously starting to copy her). Anise Stanley-Guo, this steer-riding redhead ingenue's name is. As soon as she gapes her maw and utters the first wizened, arid "have you ever been mansplained to?" I almost, as if programmed to, take out my phone and begin checking up on the Crystal Cafe threads.

I start one about what it means to be funny as a woman.

Conceptually, CC is a hangout spot for the darkly comedic,[43] the bitter and disenfranchised boob-havers of the world, the ones whom Bateman's

[43] Anise just made a wet fart of a joke about guys trying to explain "sportsball"—there it is *again*—to her for the 50th time.

principle (not Patrick Bateman—Angus John Bateman, buddy) hath damned. The vast majority of our users, like me, wanted a place where we could ply our batty theories or simply be heard. A true snake pit, a crab-lined bucket of toxicity, a soapbox for vaginated untouchables. You might think of CC as a cybernetic spiritual beacon for the real female comedians of the world. *I* think we're funny.

(Anise has briskly moved on to a bit about "sportsball" guy's missing abdominal muscle. She stumbles over the word "abdominal" like a rank amateur. I'm chewing on the ice cubes in my water while I await my Wanda Sykes segments. Hope I get the ones made from her giant, voluminous ass.)

See, what these supposed "funny women" get wrong is their framing of the ethos.

Most have caught on to the fact that we've got some full-scale Nietzschean *ressentiment* going down (I'm not a philosophy buff by any means, but I did read a couple of the books Dax left lying around that he clearly didn't bother to read himself). A few still clutch at tepid punchlines about the "meaninglessness of it all, pxrsxnkind" or the value of having a stiff drink and a good lay in the face of a godless universe, man, but those acts are on the older end, or they're appealing to an aging audience. Those women who would count themselves among the trendsetters in comedy are fully onboard with the *ressentiment* routine (the men are, too, but their targets aren't the same—they choose to go after whites, their own masculinity—fashion themselves into harmless, inert objects) and direct their ire toward what they're told is the problem, what they *feel* is the problem. ("I saw on the news that same-sex marriage is under fire in Somalia. Holy moly!..." Or: "I thought about something the other day—new mothers talk twice as much as regular women. As *if* we needed more reason to hate them!") But like sperg Nietzsche's prophesied last (wo)man, these acts lack any semblance of vitality. We've heard it all before. Every show, every song, every fucking advertisement is filled with these snide, lame-ass remarks. Coupled with their perverse desire to remain "politically correct" (the term itself is unbelievably gay, even when used jokingly at this point, but bear with me), this yields a comedy routine that would make a stillbirth look like a supernova.

If these creatures that sully Dicky's stage had any sense about them, any *prescience*, they would see that *they're not going for enough*.

Attacking the spoon-fed sources of these problems using dated jokes (Anise's "sportsball" guy eventually proposed to her, but she cheated on him with his friend, "screwdriver ;) guy," and now she's single and "f-as-in-*fuck*" loving it)

is going to lead to nothing but safe shit and eyerolls from people like me who want that good shit, that pure Colombian spite, hot-shotted straight into our veins. But it's hard to come up with routines about weaponizing the homeless against the government to conquer the city and eventually the country; or inventing a device to cast Bruno Mars into the inner sanctums of the sun for having the gall to write "Marry You," or what it feels like to be tormented by a half-Ukrainian, half-Indigenous boy who was the first boy to ever reach out to you and ask you out during your teen years—when you were desperate, so very desperate, for a boyfriend, for *anyone*, who might show you romantic attention after years of being neglected because your body was still a little on the husky side, and your lens prescription was still severe, and you were *still* half-black, so boys and people in general in your conservative hometown were more often than not dismissive of you from the outset. So you took him up on the offer, and he was sweet to you for a time before you learned that he also came from a treacherously impaired family, and that his means of taking out his frustrations was to get drunk, smoke weed with his degenerate, made-for-EI dropout friends, and thrash you within a few inches of your life while you had to tell your teachers at school that you were accident prone and that they could try calling your parents, but your parents weren't going to pick up, and when you close your eyes at night, sometimes you still see those violent tableaus and taste the ringlets of copper in your bottom lip, and you feel like that meme where the stick figure's in the dark room that's all scratched out and there's a thought bubble where the stick figure imagines himself standing over a demon, stabbing it furiously, ha ha, and that even though this boy was in a near-fatal accident while drunk driving one night with said loathsome friends, you helped nurse him back to health because back then you still had strong, nebulous notions of The Good, that you were going to defy common sense and circumstance to adhere to, and the boy didn't bat an eye when he came out of his coma and you told him he'd lost his friend in the accident, one of his childhood friends with whom he'd shared nearly every major milestone a boy can experience, and he just smirked and said, "Better him than me" and went back to beating you as soon as he'd regained his motor skills (and never gave you a cent of the boatload of insurance money he was paid out from the crash to cover the costs of the things you bought him while he was recovering) and *still, even after ALL these YEARS,* finds occasion to create fake social media accounts, now that you've gone to great lengths to block him on his pre-existing ones, to DM you and badger you with cryptic, pseudo-poetic ramblings about your being incapable of ever finding someone "as beatific and soul-seaing [sic] as [him]" (because after he sustained a significant head injury in the crash and slowly regained his wits, he developed an overblown, affected, incoherent, makeshift turn-of-the-century

parlance through which he tries to sound saintly or better than you, like some Griffith-inspired psycho), and you had to go back to him because there was nowhere else to go! And then you bided your time and you *finally* escaped! It was hilarious! And and and no amount of melatonin helps now! ha HA! when you try ha to sleep!!! And your greatest struggle, Gao, Goo, Bao, your very *dearest* agony in this life has been thoughtlessly cheating on by someone you loved because you *think* men are misogynists is why I hope the final joke of your act is to produce from your back pocket a well-constructed noose so that you might hang yourself in front of us and get your first genuine laugh of the night, you wretched normie bitch.

Anyway, the tendies are here now. Three extra strips.

The thread I'm in about climbing trees has become a conversation about how the Japanese would've given up two years earlier and prevented the Hiroshima/Nagasaki fiascos if they'd been given mandatory twink bfs in time. I add that Yukio Mishima could've been used as Patient Zero for this operation. But then I remember that he failed the military's health tests and worked in a factory during the wartime. Maybe I should have said Emperor Hirohito. Oh, well—it was still a zinger.

(Anise ends her sloppy routine. No noose.)

Dax returns to see how I'm liking the strips, and to "yoink" a few himself and spill the "special sauce" from the ramakin onto the table while Cowgirl introduces the next act, another female comedian by the name of Serena "Vixen" Achewe.[44] And to tell me he's been mackin' Yngali but finds Anice hot for an older chick (who apparently also steals extras of the water bottles they provide the comedians with backstage): "Can' tell if Yng's inna me. But she said she wanned to talk to me 'about somethin' in the staff room later."

(""""Vixen""" commences with an observation re: corporate culture's misunderstanding of menstrual cycles.)

Yngali's gonna try to deal him drugs, isn't she? Fuck it. He'll figure it out.

"You could make her jealous by going for Licorice—Anise—in front of her." (Hold on—could I do the same and make Avery jealous by hitting on someone in front of him? No, no—stupid!)

"Eiiiiuughhg..."

"Source: Trust me, bro. You should try it."

[44] It's so much worse when they give themselves epithets like that.

"Eiiigh...M*a*ybe."

"Just be careful. And don't bring her back to the apartment. I may be tempted toward homicide."

"Do you mean Anise or Yngali?"

"Either. Both."[45]

"All righ', I gotta get back—Dick's gon yell at me. Can I steal another tendie to go?"

"Go ahead."

It takes everything I have not to yell at this Vixen creature who's on stage. So I take the plate the one-fewer-in-number tendies are on and my iPad with me outside to have a smoke-by-proxy through the folks standing out in the deadening nighttime quagmire.

With this last exchange, I think I've figured out my potential plans of attack for Avery. But I need one last crucial piece of the puzzle...

14

"Back in the (Debt) Trap (Café)," ft. Mr. C.

Not to complain, but having a job in the """"*current year*""" is about as appealing and as progenitive as salting and eating your own foot (which might be more profitable, since you could monetize it online). A great deal of the time, being employed—particularly, at a formerly-impressive-now-doo-doo café like mine—consists of rote-learned, near-anonymous grunt-work operations. ("It's like all I know is fine dining...and breathing!") The facilitation of transactions, the dispensing of (questionable) goods and (laconic) services. *Is that credit or debit? Would you like your avocado poison blob warmed up or stanky-storage-room cold?* You're reduced to these prefab dialogue wheel choices. Any and all attempts at individuality (you mustn't risk garnering negative online reviews!!!) are met with extreme caution and suspicion. In some parts of North America, I hear, death. When the workplace mind control devices (the Antichrist) are eventually integrated into the economic fabric via the selected accelerationist transhumanist midwife

[45] Okay—I stole this joke from *Archer,* which I love for the race-romance dynamic between Lana and Archer.

(Elon Musk), dialogue choices will be forced upon obedient workers, and on-the-job interactions will be timed to the millisecond.

These are the types of things I'd like to discuss with our charming clientele, but for reasons previously stated, I'm prevented from doing so. As a result, the bulk of my conversations with customers consist of surface-level pleasantries and entire chatlogs of withheld dialogue on my end. The only customer interaction I have at this point is with Mr. Clemence.

He started coming around Cure before I started working here, according to Leticia (the Friday/Saturday girl). He lives a few blocks down on Cordova Street in an apartment with his two cats, a big bully of a Calico named Kira, and a calm, attentive confidant of a black cat named Salem. He turned 70 in November, and he's got seven grandchildren from his two sons and used to have a stepdaughter. (Apparently, according to Maria, something happened to her???) He spent 35 years as an English professor at my old university, SFUBC, with a focus on 17th-century lit. His wife, Eileen, passed three years ago, and without her, he said he had more time to make the rounds than he knew what to do with.

We don't say much to each other—he'll sometimes ask about my school, or if I've read any good books recently. I'll make him a medium "Crushin' Cortado" (Yes, Raphael was the one who changed the menu item names) or anything else he feels in the mood for—and I'll throw some coffee art on it to make it extra nice.

Then, he typically turns to go to his spot by the far-right window, with the view of the greasy Granville and Pender intersection (he somehow never gets annoyed with all the honking cars, flagrant assaults, and constant construction), and reads—poetry, mostly, which I'll occasionally peek at. By default, this makes him my favourite customer. He reminds me of a more refined Pawpaw.

I need his help today. For reasons I can't cosmically place yet, he needs to be the one to aid me with my final Avery-based decision. But he must show up before that can happen.

Oh, but who has decided to park his lurid lime-green 8 Series BMW right in front of the café, throw on his hazards, let a wave of midday chill in with him, and make our collective lives worse for the day? None other than Raphael. (Today, his name is Riccardo. I call him by a new R name every day—he just *loves* it and *never* asks me to stop in his sibilant-y Italiano accent.)

Lately, Raphael's been arriving like this, wearing one of those Tommy Hilfiger polo shirts Indian guys with negative drip wear, as well as a Gucci murse and True Religion jeans, or some similarly dreadful combination, getting Maria to make him a *medioissimo* chai, and bothering us with concerns regarding Google ads for the business.[46]

I asked him how the campaigns have been, and he said Maria has been helping him "a-a lot."

I prayed to the innermost essence of the universe it was only the writing she helped him with.

My guess is the ads aren't working because, following recent renovations, the interior of the café has that non-descript minimalist "ease of use" feel that everyone's going for these days—the same ones you see in dispensaries and 2020's apartments and banks.[47]

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[46] He spent an hour after close last week asking if we knew anything about SEO (search engine optimization) and made us sit with him in the back and brainstorm marketing strategies that would help us draw in more customers. Maria suggested creating more exploratory campaigns and tracking the ROI instead of constantly starting new campaigns when results don't come right away. Leticia suggested becoming more active on social media and creating reels about different aspects of the business. Greyston, our part-part-timer student trainee brought in to somehow replace all three of the workers we lost last month, suggested attending local events with a pop-up booth. I suggested we ask Aman what's working for him. To my knowledge, it was an unpaid consultation.

[47] Greyish laminate flooring, white cabinets, light-brown tables with utility-first chairs, a high-seating area with the worst fucking ass-numbing industrial stools you've ever seen, a multi-tiered glass display case at the front on a white faux-marble counter. Heating and cooling ducts above because the contractor either couldn't be bothered to finish the ceiling or because Raphael liked the aesthetic affront to all of human history they're calling an "open-ceiling style." Fucking laminate flooring on the walls? (For what reason?!) Not a texture in sight. But the *pièce de rageistance* has to be the photo wall. The saddest, most pandering feature any café can have. Ours isn't composed of pink fuzz; ours looks more like a temporary photo stand at a baby shower: off-white background, "live, laugh, love"-adjacent cursive of the words "family," "health," and "good coffee" spaced out from one another in a preposterous font (Raphael wanted to use an Eleanor Roosevelt quote, but I convinced him this would bring upon the café a thousand voodoo curses because of the atrocities she personally committed in the Caribbean during the 1930s. (I made it all up, but I can do this with people like him, because they have no idea what kind of black I am, or if I have any authority over the culture, and I with every part of my being didn't want to have to look at another public-school essay-tier quote about self-discovery or perseverance every day), random fake flowers pinned to Shutterstock images of horizons and happy families (encased in cheap gold frames). But no Michelle Obama influences in sight, so there's that.

Would it even be worth it to ask Maria to clarify what he meant by "help"? They've been getting closer recently. I don't like it at all. "People" like Raphael don't deserve love with south-of-the-border BBL shawties, "people" who would convince themselves that owning a used luxury vehicle and remortgaging their home to prop up their failing business and fraudulent, performative lifestyles would equate to success, would designate them as 21st-century lord agents of the elites, supreme economic representatives, and not shallow, purposeless vassals, the same entities they would accuse *us* of being!

As I open my mouth to address/save/liberate Maria and broach the Sephardic *elevant in za (back)room*, I hear the electronic buzzer Raphael rigged up on the front door that goes off when customers enter the building. I'm prepared for it to be a Zoomer teen or another overworked mom with children on leashes, but it's Mr. C.

Today, a 5-hour ENERGY and a few Tums (munched during a dissociation episode on the bus) have me feeling bold. Maria's salvation must wait. Mr. C must determine the last parameters of my love life's prophecy.

"Heads or tails?" I propose as he nears the counter.

"Oh, hello, Savoy. What's this now?"

"I need your help settling something. Heads or tails? Whether you realize it or not, the entirety of my future depends on your decision right this moment."

"Well, that's a lot of pressure to put on a fella, wouldn't you say? What's this about?"

"Romance, beauty, virtue, truth—the wellspring from which might effuse the great vindications of man."

[*cont.*] In contrast, the previous iteration of the café (*Ur*-Cure) was modeled loosely after those of the Old World. The hardwood flooring (real wood—something delightful, like wormy chestnut—I could never figure out which) would creak in a few spots and sing its dusty falsettos. The cabinets were hand-made and hand-painted in a forest green. The tables were a fun mahogany with a circle marble slab on top, and they matched the chairs, which each had a wobbly leg or two that made sitting a mirthful challenge. There was no gay high-seating area. The front display had gold metal trim and iron shelving that looked vaguely Gilded-Age-ish. Our workspace was real Calacatta marble. On the walls were knick-knacks and collectibles from Aman's travels in Europe: Vinyl covers for French jazz albums, brass instruments, signed pictures of writers. And we had a proper *goddamned* ceiling.

This isn't a new observation, but I think I'm beginning to see the value in those trad-Cath statue-Twitter posts that get semi-ironically reposted on CC about how minimalism shrinks the soul. Every time a texture is removed from one's environment, an angel develops a patch of eczema.

"Dear me...If that's what's on the line, then I suppose I should choose heads, wouldn't you say?"

"Excellent choice, Mr. C. Excellent choice."

(He chose "Ask out the boy you've been courting from afar in the style of a mutated Romeo," rather than "Throw a brick as hard as you can through his window and invade his home, forcing him to fall for you 😈.")

15

Avery, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. A-ver-y: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. A. Ver. Y.

Okay, I may or may not be sitting at Panacea's "Table 4," as it's labelled on the seating plan that's close to the schedule that's hanging near the front, chugging a small mocha that costs exactly $4.76 after tax and before tip (40% to curry favour) and tastes better than the one I make because it's made with what I hope is love and better hot chocolate mix. Aaaaaaaand I may or may not be drawing Avery again on my iPad instead of sketching out one of my latest commissions, a custom-designed *My Little Pony* character reading Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* to Rainbow Dash and the gang "in a cuddly story time" where I'm to "make them seem very happy & content :)" Thank you, "ponyaimepony" from Brussels, Belgium, for the 100 EUR. You shouldn't have...

The decision has been locked in: I'm talking to Avery. It's *happening*. (I think.) But first, another drink.

Avery dips out for a bathroom break, so I make my move. (Need to replace my mocha so that I can legitimize staying here another two hours to complete more recon.) It's Asian Babygirl this go around.

"What can I [get] for ya?"[48]

"I'll do another mocha...Please."

"Su[uuure~~] What size?"

[48] She's got a nauseating way of lifting her tone mid-sentence that is even worse than Dax's. Everything she says has around it those cute squigglies anime fans use when texting—but these ones are maniacal. I've decided we're enemies.

"Uhm...medium again."

"Okie. Want anything to [eat] with that? uwu" (she didn't really say "uwu," but indulge me).

"No—I'm fi—" (all I've eaten today is a banana and a handful of Fuzzy Peaches). "Actually, do you guys have any tikka masala left?"

"Yep~~ It'll take about ten min[utes]. Is that ok[ay?]"

I hope Aman's the one making it. Despite my frequent visits, I haven't managed to see more than the back of his head through the kitchen pass. He must be very busy with all these customers coming through.

"I love~~ your hair, btw," she says, and I'm partly taken aback. (This is the only true compliment I get these days. Western media is so intent on showing us on commercials and shows now that the broccoli look is becoming desirable for the first time in my life. White people and everyone else taken along for the ride actually *want* hair like mine...I'm suspicious. I call this phenomenon "The *Black Panther* Effect.")

As I go to respond, I see beauteous, sacred Apollo round the corner. Should he not have been in the washroom longer, even if he was only urinating? I thought I would have more time!

"We'll bring your order to y[ou~~]"

"Euugiighhghh..." (Fuck! Now I sound like Dax!) I do a 180° and make a beeline toward my seat.

"'Scuse me! Your num[ber~~]" (I forgot they give you numbered Portuguese dungeon keys to symbolize your order here. What a touch!)

"Ueughhguehg..."

I jet back to my table. Close one. I look around to see if anyone noticed my display. Apparently not. Everyone's doing their thing: browsing the internet, chatting with their table partner, attempting to write that romance novel about an old high school love stand-in.[49] What a difference

[49] Ohh, Norma, *honey,* Chaddington turned you down all those years ago and slept with all your friends because he didn't think you were hot. Mhm...*yeah*...sorry! Transmuting your latent feelings for him into an idyllic, Dante-like immortalization of affection via slutty, raucous borderline erotica (sometimes in historical settings, like the Norman Conquest) you dare not show your husband for fear of a senior divorce just ain't the move at your age, sweetie. Hope you understand!

good ambiance makes. So many of the fixtures that brought character to Cure have reappeared in Panacea—the marble-topped tables, the rickety chairs, the forest green accents, the wall knick-knacks—it's like being inside Cure's wealthier, more successful sister. (You know what I mean.) And the patrons seem to be loving it. If you check their IGs, they're filled with pictures people have tagged the café in. Most are pointless, ephemeral shots of hands holding take-out cups. Or pics of the curries or entrées with NPC captions like "This is making me hungry! #panacea #meals #localeats #the604 #mywifeleftmeplzhelp." But if you get as much organic engagement as Panacea does, you're doing something right.

And the best part: No godforsaken photo wall. The soothingness of the place allows me a light reprieve from the idea that I might've embarrassed myself irredeemably in front of Avery. I'm not ready to speak to him yet—no, I need more time to prepare and study.

Earlier today, I posted a thread where I asked the other nonas (anonymous female users) if they've had any experiences with unrequited love or love from a distance (a thinly veiled attempt at asking for romantic advice without violating the rules). Looks like I've gotten some responses:

unrequited love? Anonymous 4 hours 264352
>>264358 >>264370 >>264385

any experiences with unrequited love with non-viscerally revolting moids? or love from a distance? is there nay way to make it work or is it just fucking doomed?

Anonymous 4 hours 264358

>>264352 (You)
It always ends in heartbreak, but I really admire anyone who can do that now in an age where a woman's life is nothing but a never-ending procession of mediocre cocks and Pajeets offering to marry you.

Anonymous 4 hours 264369 >>264379

Unrelated, but I found a lump today. Any doctor nonas in the house?

Anonymous 4 hours 264370

>>264352 (You)
You're trying to become a sex-haver? If so, you should renounce your femininity right here and now and accept that all moids are hogg-weilding pigs, raging cock beasts who can't think beyond sex and farting. Don't Don't Don't be the one to approach!

This is the mollifying rancour and hard-hitting advice I'm used to. And this is also why I should hold off on approaching him. If it's meant to happen, it will. They're right—the chances are so low if I up and force myself on him. If he wanted me, being one of the "cock beasts" all men are (I can't say that of him—it can't be—I won't allow it), then he probably would have approached me already... 😓

Pounding back the first mocha that fast might've been a misstep. I need to pee. No need to ask anyone to watch my stuff—with minor exceptions, the customers of Panacea, unlike ours, aren't sociopaths with deplorable taste, so it's hard to conceive of them stealing. I grab the customers' washroom key from the tasteful hanger on the wall and rush into one of the well-maintained stalls.[50]

All done. Rinse, dry, make sure hand tissue makes it to the bin. Hang the key up. Mind the blind spot by the corner so I don't bump into anyone.

Then I see Avery walk toward my table with my order. I watch him set down the ordered items and gaze down at my iPad. I lose control of my limbs. I'm dying.

Ossifying on the spot. (🇻🇦)

I'm not spiritual in an organized, definable way. I wish more people were.[51] But while I have no connection with any specific deity, I find myself praying to every single one out there that I remembered to change my iPad settings to lock the screen after one minute instead of ten.

My legs come back to me so I may begin my coal-walk back to my table.

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[50] Not sure what possesses café customers to attempt to soil washrooms as they do, but if our post-secondary institutions wanted to fund studies that mattered, they would bankroll a few on this phenomenon. Please don't go into your local Starbucks and smear your feces on the walls. People like me are tasked with cleaning it up because our bosses are convinced it's okay to have the people handling your beverages also hose down your diarrhea. Thank you.

[51] I was raised secular in my early life, unless you count the times Janice dropped me off at Sunday school so she could have more freedom to shoot junk/goop and commit petty crimes in the name of scoring more.

He's looking at it. He's looking at it. Heslookingatit.

"I have a mocha here for #4," he intimates.

"Th-Th-That's me."

"The tikka masala will be another few minutes."

"O-O-kay. Tha-a-a-nks." (If this were an anime, I'd have *bikkuri* eyes—or maybe the spiral eyes that characters get when they're traumatized or down tremendously. The marching band living in my auditory cortex begins to play "Komm, Süsser Tod"

"Can I get you anything else while I'm here?" he asks angelically.

"Hu—Chu—Nuh—" ("I know, I know I've let you down / I've been a fool to myself..." ♪♪)

Pause.

("...I thought that I could live for no one else..."

Pause.

("...So, with sadness in my heart..."

Pause.

"I'll take that as a no."

Pause.

("....Feel the best thing I could do..."

"I hope you don't mind my asking, as it isn't in my habit to snoop on customers, but would this illustration happen to be of me? On top of *My Little Pony* characters?

("...Is end it all and leave for-e-ver."

Shiva *et al.* failed me. There it is, my iPad—still open to the Procreate file of the pony sketches with two illustrations of Avery overhead (one in profile, one of his head and upper-body if he were dressed in a double-breasted Venetian vicuna frock coat).

I'm on the verge of surrendering to vertigo, Shinji-ing myself in the chair, when I hear "Sa**voy**, is tha**t you**?"

And He appears—(Savoy wept ✝️☪️☯️😭)

"My **dear friend**! It has **been** so **long**! I **make you** my **best** witout kn**o**wing!"[52]

"A-A-Aman! H-Hey! Hi..." (Aman, *also* the light of my life, fire of my... *appreciation*?)

"I yam s**o** h**appy** to see. T**a**ke, t**a**ke. **Eat**. A-**ver**y, you kn**o**w who this **is**? Great empl**oy**ee from Cure."

"Ah, you work at Cure on Granville Street?" Avery poses.

"Hurr—Ahh—"

"She d**o**. Wish she w**ork** f**or** me, bu**t** 'sch**oo**l,' she say."[53]

"And drawing, it would seem," Avery says, making direct eye contact.

"Yes. V**e**ry **t**alen**t**. V**er**y," Aman adds.

"Ghu—Krrau—"

"Would you like some water? You don't look so well," Avery says.

"**Get wat**er," Aman commands.

I use Avery's departure as a chance to sit down and collect myself. Aman celebrates me in his endearing Aman-ese one last time before excusing himself to head to the back.

"Your water," Avery says upon his return.

Knock it back faster than I have any right to, hoping it ignites some miraculous chemical reaction in my throat that allows me to properly form words in his presence.

"Wow—watch out for your iPad."

This is how the mortals of Athens must have felt upon glimpsing their holy figures (barring that weird stuff with Zeus turning into a goat to rape women)—oh! What Buddha must have felt after spending those 49 (69? 😏) days under the bodhi tree—oh!

[52] His accent has him accentuate certain phonemes like the cheeriest Southeast Asian elder.

[53] I was in school at the time of the transition and used that as an excuse. I wanted Aman's new venture to succeed, and I was certain I'd drag him down somehow.

My moment of rapture is cut short when Asian Babygirl calls Avery over. Something about being "n[ee]ded on cash~~"

"I've gotta get back," he says. "But no one's ever drawn me before, especially not in a frock coat like that. I'm flattered. At the risk of sounding presumptuous, do you happen to have an art account somewhere? Could I pay you for those?"

Summarily: jghdgjdjsdlgjdshgkjdsjgdsnjk!!!!gjksghdjskghdjskghdj !!!! yabadabadoo!!!!!!! (We on that Fred Flintstone kush 🪨💨)

"I—Eiiighhg...Well—[54]...I th-think I still have m-m–ah-y old art IG b—sorry, *page*."

"Cool. Would you mind if I added you?"

IcantremembertheaccountnameIcantremembertheaccountnameIcantremembertheaccountnameIjustcleareditaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!

"I-I'll have to find the a-account. Can I add you?"

"That works. I'm *@avery.d.bazin*. Do you need me to write it down?"

IwantasampleofhishandwritingIwantasampleofhishandwritingIwantasampleofhishandwriting!

He searches his apron. Pats himself down.

"I don't have a pen or paper on me." (Babygirl is eyeing us. Hard.) "This might be a little unconventional, but, actually, if you're planning on hanging around, could I come by your table later?"

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!

(O, Hallowed Stars; O Holy Night!) "Please!"

♀

For the XX[th] day in a row, the clouds are an endless tessellation, threatening fits of rain, snow, or hail. Everything around me is preposterously bright because I haven't managed to sleep more than, say, two or three hours since making my decision last week to nab Avery. Funny things start to happen to you when you get this far into an insomnia episode.

[54] Leading him to my commissions page online would be a mistake. *Way* too many samples of demented custom pieces on there.

The 1st day without sleep's fine. You feel jacked up, invincible. Your heart's going at such a rate you'd think you'd just cracked a few Monster Zeros. You can still work on projects (*e.g.*, a commission of Lebron James relieving himself in the Skibidi Toilet for a 16-year-old's drop-shipping store's next ill-fated clothing line), talk to people, operate light machinery. Sometimes, you get special bouts of frisson from the cortisol spikes, and everything you care about swells up into view and envelopes you, like a caring grandparent that feeds you too much ice cream.

The 2nd day still ain't nothin' if you're a veteran. Maybe you're a tad miffed 'cause you needed to lock in for a test and now you can't; or you wanted to keep working on a project, or you had plans with someone special and now you're starting to feel a little queasy. Nevertheless, you're able to get a bit of work done. You might look pale when you go out, but you're alive and participating.

The third day separates the GMO wheat from the chaff. You're moody. You begin forgetting routine things you know you know—words, faces, old teachers' names. You're getting precious little done, and it's of a low quality (whenever I draw like this, I become a less talented, Gravol-laced iteration of Picasso). Your motor skills betray you. You skip the social function.

The 4th day, boy, oh, boy...it's time to Face the Pain (by STEMM). Your mood observes only polarities. Language deserts you wholesale (every word becomes a malignant anagram). You accomplish jack shit. Letting you operate a vehicle would be downright criminal. If there was a social function to attend, you've forgotten about it altogether.

But the 5th day without sleep...The 5th day...Things become...emoji-y...😈😈😈

I'm *somewhat* safe, mind you. The micro-naps have been keeping me from having to cast off into the sick man's astral plane. But my speech is starting to slip, big time.

It's now 3:21 PM, and Avery isn't free. Has he forgotten about me? (Wouldn't blame him. I'm sooo ugly"😖 So 😖 so 😩😩 sooo 😩😩😩 ugly! 😭😭😭😭")

I pretend to fiddle with today's second commission, a 3-second banner ad animation of Shrek with massive gazongas (ordered by a Chinese company named Mencent).

"Apologies!" I hear him blurt to Babygirl and two other coworkers. "I'm gonna move my longboard to the back—it keeps getting in the way." One of the co-workers is recognizable from the old Cure days—Theon.[55]

[55] He/Himbo left during the storied Aman exodus. Understandably. We were on okay terms. Bit of an oddball. He was also a fan of qt3.15, but only her new stuff.

Asian Babygirl feigns being mad at Avery and pats him on the succulent, marble-etched Apollonian shoulder. Tells him something to the effect of "You'll h[ave] to make it up to m[e]!" (I'm 👄-reading). Flashes me a dirty glance (🗿🤰).

He shoots to the back. Theon continues existing. Avery returns, adjusting his apron and rolling up the sleeves of his baby-blue button down (🧴💦). Babygirl (💅) addresses him again while making a drink for another Romance Writer. Won't stop smiling. Hip bumps him playfully (😡). He plays off of it. Checks the clock on the wall. Scans the place.

Sees me (❗)

Raises his eyebrows (❗❗)

Smiles (❗❗❗)

Time to remind him!

Babygirl (💁‍♀️) cuts in before I (🧟‍♀️) can make it to the counter and call out to Avery. Her endearing tildes are gone. (I hope someone smashes this London-Tipton-reskinned, ombre-highlighted, coffin-nailed cunt's Mazda Miata [I'm guessing] after work today. Oh, wait—that could be arranged! (⚒️)

Fuck me, then. More waiting. Back to the tablet grind goes Savoy...(🤓📱😭)

♀

29 minutes and *roughly* 39 seconds later, Avery blesses me at my table.

(Eat your heart out, ABG. Keep shooting those metaphysical daggers 🗡️🗡️.)

"Should I even ask what this is about?" he jokes, sidling up to my left. (My head's down over my tablet, adding blush to Shrek's left breast.)

"Ahh...Oh, gawd. Eiighh...Iz nawt wha ihh loo—"

"Don't worry about it—we all have our side gigs. This *is* a side gig, right? You aren't *actually* a public *MLP* and *Shrek* Rule 34-lover, are you?"

[*cont.*] One time, he tried to ask Maria out, but she said no, so he sent me an essay about how Maria didn't know what she was missing out on, how a consummate gentleman like him, someone who cared about the environment, gave to charity, and was staunchly politically active, deserved to be understood. He said he was a part of our city's Extinction Rebellion chapter. I told him to present his piss jars to her as a betrothal offering, and he never responded. He left Cure two weeks later.

(Please—let me sound normal. Sleep paralysis demon, make this deal with me—I will let you visit me every night this week if you grant me temporary powers of elocution during this period of deprivation. I will prick my ring finger and sign the agreement in blood 🩸!)

"I promise you I'm not." (Ah! It worked. Thanks, Tormentor! 🦹)

"Wouldn't have judged you if you were. At least, not completely. But someone with a look as cool as yours didn't strike me as the type to get off to such things."

"Yeueu—You like my look?"

"Yeah. If you don't mind my saying.[56] I haven't seen anyone with those tattoos. What's the one on your right forearm?" (Am I to roll up mine sleeve in thy presence, my liege? Well, if'st thou asketheth!)

"It's a sequence of three robot poses from Hajime Sorayama. He's a superrealist."

"Very nice."

"*Now let's see Paul Allen's tattoos.*"[57]

He stares at me for a moment.

It's over. (😞)

He starts laughing. (😃)

"I've been spending too much time at Dorsia to make it to the tattoo studio. Been meaning to get one," he says, easing into his seat. "Now that I think about it, I should've given you my email so you could send the files over." He takes out a $50. "Will this be enough? I have more in my work apron if this isn't sufficient."

(He could offer me soiled dirt and I'd take it right now. But I may never financially recover from my courting procedures, so maybe I should accept it. lmao 🙃)

"That's too much!"

[56] The fit: a billowy white 18th-century-style sleeveless dress shirt, with black lace corset on top; cropped beige dress pants, black Oxford lace-ups; golden chains hanging from most pockets; makeup: light goth bitch/e-girl-adjacent.

[57] Oh god. I made the joke without thinking.

"Nonsense. They were *really* good. Artists should get paid for their time. Everyone thinks we ought to work for free for some reason." (*We*? !!!!)

I accept and hand him a SFUBC-themed USB while slyly attempting to make contact with his hand. When he sees it, he notes that his sister went to my school. I nearly slip up and tell him I know she did, but I can't have him suspect I also did a deep dive on his immaculate, Aryan wet-dream sister.

ABG keeps yelling at Theon. She must be complaining about Avery's absence. Avery's passing the USB between his fingers.

"This may be presumptuous of me, but I've got tickets to the art gallery—a new exhibit they're putting on this Thursday. Contemporary stuff. Would you care to join? You strike me as someone who would appreciate it."

Outside, the cumuli part ⬅️☁️➡️, and a great thrust of light shatters upon the city, tumbles its way through the café's windows to fall gently upon our feet.

Alnubu'at alreazimat lilsayid klimins! (! النبوءة العظيمة للسيد كليمنس) (*The Great Prophecy of Mr. Clemence!*):

The clouds shall part; the sun shall stride forth boldly 'tween the hours of 3:30 PM and 3:57 PM. The Salubrious Prince (*al'amir salih* ;الأمير صالح) shall importune the Lowly Broccoli Wench (*almutawadie alqarnabit baghy*; المتواضع القرنبيط بغي) with the Divined, Holy Tickets (*tadhakir majaaniat limaerid fankufar lilfunun*; تذاكر مجانية لمعرض فانكوفر للفنون), and through this machination and its Resultant Dates (*laqad qumt bitakhdirihi, fayaqae fi hubiy wala yatrukuni abdan. 'ana faqat 'amzahu! hu hu!*; لقد قمت بتخديره، فيقع في حبي ولا يتركني أبدًا. أنا فقط أمزح! هو هو!), she shall become The Fulfilled Mother (*al'umu alwafa'*; الأم الوفاء), Patron Saint of Botanicals (*shafie / wali alnabatat*; شافع / والي النباتات), Breaker of Soibois (*qawatie suybwa*; قواطع السوبويس), Haver of Sex (*hafir min aljins*; حافر من الجنس)—and they shall live together happily ever after! 🥰🇸🇦🕋 [58]

"Y-Y-Yeah. I'd like to go," I hyperventilate.

"Great. Thursday at the Vancouver Art Gallery—7:00 PM. I'll send you the event info through Insta."

(Eeee

And with that, my sleep paralysis demon's powers wear off, Avery returns to work, and fatigue assails me. I *inhale* my hot chocolate, pack up my stuff, and zoot out of there as fast my barely conscious self can manage, grinning like a smile filter meme all the way home 😁.

16

And you wonder 🧐🤔 how i stole 👨🏿👩🏿 ur man 👻, sweatie? 👩‍🦰🎂

Well, it's pretty simple 😳😳: I'm dangerously ⚠️☣️ retarded! 🤦🏻‍♂️😱🥵 😏 It's as easy as that. 👀👁️ If you want a man 👨‍🦱👅 to appreciate you 🤗🤩, touch you 😖😫🤚, squeeze you 😩🤏, tease you 😭🤌, ditch the diet 🌭🌮🌭❌. Ditch the new wardrobe 👙👚🥋❌. Ditch the fake 🅱️oo🅱️s 🌰🤷‍♀️🌰. Ditch the hard 😩🤔 work 🏋️‍♂️⛑️. Lower ⬇️ your IQ!!! 🧠❌😎 Break some rules! 📏💥 While you're out there getting your manicures 💅✨ and hitting the gym 🤳💪🏻🏃‍♀️, I'm eating 🤤 untreated leather 👞💼 and posting Ryan Gosling 🐓🤳 💁‍♀️ edits on my super secret ❓🤫 internet 🤫💻🤐🔞 forums! Heh. 😂 You're so comfortable within your #girlboss 👯‍♀️👩🚺 box—look at you! 🔭😜 A real man 👨‍🦱🚰 wants someone with a few screws 🔩🪛 loose, a couple cards 🃏💳 missing ⁉️ from her de(i)ck! 🟥 Calls 'em 📞🤳 like she please 'em. 😖🍆💦 Or however the saying goes! 🤔🤔 I dunno! 😜 🥳 But what I do know ☝️ is that he's cumming 🗣️💦💦 home to me tonight, ⏰🌓 and there's nothing a smartie fartie 🤖👩🏿‍🦱💨 dumb-dumb 🤫😝 like u can do about it! 😛😛😋 toodle-oo! 👋🏻👋🏻 Don't let the cat 🐈😹 drag you in 🙀 on your way out!~~~ ➡️➡️⬅️➡️⬇️

Me: (ง'̀u'́)wow!*☆

You: (ಥ⌓ಥ)

(Avery just sent me the details.~~~

17

Bimbo Hike (Mud Edition)

One could relay in full for you the fiendish misery that was hiking with Dax and Ashleighyn/Asheillieughyn/Ashxyzwynnunlyn (added to the McIntosh Street Hall of Shame that same night) around the SFUBC campus trails.[59]

But: The hike sucked.

And she had the Aritzia Mind-Eating Amoeba. Was worried about getting mud on her shoes. Kept bleating on about how freezing she was. I offered to switch shoes with her to shut her up. Tried to explain the roles of the various trees and plants to them, but they giggled the whole time and took up space as semi-sentient matter.

(Glad Dax got the exercise, though. That was the point of inviting him.)

Anyway, screw Asheuighlieughnynnyn and their trash date—why don't we just cut to the good shit?

18

Exhibit Deez Nuts 🥜🥜

The bus was late due to "inclement homeless person activity and public demonstrations" (liberalese), so I arrive at the gallery a little after 7:00.

I'm outright panting, gushing perspiration as I push through the doors. The other would-be attendees are milling around the lobby, mostly wearing jeans and T-shirts (one guy's in one of those rum-shack shirts you get in Mexico that has a terrible pun on it—*I Licked All the Jugs at Jimbo Jones' Tequila Bar*—and there's a picture of a stacked brown girl holding coconuts over her chest). But fuck me if this isn't the most exciting thing that's happened to me in years.

[59] A uni campus has the charm of a restaurant/bar where the workers don't pay attention to you 'cause they're too busy, the pints used to be cheaper, and the buffalo wings and lettuce wraps used to taste better, but you still go anyway 'cause it's the thing to do. Our campus was built on a mountain, on unceded territory, but don't ask the administration where the money they raise to supposedly help Indigenous people goes, because then they get an-ger-yyyyy!

I've been practicing responding to Avery in the mirror of my bathroom—I'm *not* doing my stuttering routine in front of him! As extra insurance, I made a second deal with my sleep paralysis demon, offering one year off my lifespan in exchange for fluidity and confidence when addressing him. (If I fuck this up and drive him away and lose my last chance at companionship, I *will* Virginia Woolf myself.)

"Savoy—hey. You're here."

Dios mio! His is an outfit for an art gallery. A white pleated crew-neck shirt under a tailored navy-blue blazer that's fancy enough to need cuff links, in the form of circular gemstones. Shirt's French-tucked into designer chinos that also appear to have been tailored. Proper dress socks to go with his suede shoes (not those disastrous Costco ankle socks that everyone in their 20s wears with dress shoes). And for accessories, he's layered black and gold chains, black and gold rings (4), and picked an understated belt to balance out the formality. By contrast, my masculine-presenting boy/girl theydy femdom aesthetic is veiled in a smattering of mismatched formalwear pieces (all of different brands and fabrics sourced from Etsy, Value Village, or clothing donation bins around the city, because I'm poor and these are my *gibs me dat* reparations!)

"Shall we?" He asks. "They've just issued a few opening remarks. You haven't missed much."

"Sorry for being late. Bus, homeless person thingy, protesters. Long story!"

We get in without issue. The attendant guy—30s, Norwood Reaper victim—a *textbook moid*—says I have nice hair while handing me a program. (It will only matter when Avery says it.)

The gallery has three floors open to the public, and tonight, the feature exhibit is on the ground floor, which runs in a rectangular shape around the central staircase. The top floor is far less populated with hazy, clockwise-roaming guests than the main floor, so we start there. If this were a regular daytime visit, there might be more people, but we're technically after hours, so it's mainly those who want to get away from the initial throng.

The first exhibit we encounter is *La Hermana, Misma*, a collection of low-resolution sepia-filtered photographs from Latinx artist Octavia Santa Maria de la Noche-Smith, meant to (as the plaque at the beginning of the arrangement suggests) "evoke through tender, bittersweet photographic recollection the unseen signs of Metacam (anti-inflammatory medication, usually for pets) addiction and illuminate through meticulous, narrative-focused juxtaposition and vision the socio-political failures and incisive indictments of ineffectual Western anti-drug imperatives."

Some of the photos are framed on the walls, while others hang from improvised wiring in the middle of the space.

The informative blurb for the first photo, "Comienza," says it was taken on an iPhone 4 in 2021. (The fuck?) You can't make out anything but a vague white blob in the middle of a green patch that's probably a field at a West Van middle school.

Can't tell him how I feel about it. He'll think I'm cynical and unpleasant and psychologically unbreedable. I make the classic "thinking noise" out loud: "It's...hrmm!"

"Yes, it's rather different."

(We're walking at a snail's pace—a slug's pace—doing that art gallery thing where you navigate gingerly, hands clasped behind your back, craning your neck to study each individual piece, fingers secretly poised and ready to come apart to be lifted to the chin [or to hold hands] at the drop of a hat.)

The sixth one in the set, "Efervescencia Efímera" (alliterative title = low skill), depicts a similarly blobby blob on a swing set, mid-swing. The blob is wearing a white dress, though the filter is so janky it makes it look grey, while the rest of the setting should be green, blue, and brown, but it's Mexican-movie-set yellow.

"The colour choices are...robust," I proffer measuredly.

"I agree."

The final picture of the ordeal is titled "Tú Hiciste Eso (Partida Angelical)," which translates to "You Did This (Angelic Departure)." It's a slightly less blurry picture of a patient's pharmaceutical history, including several prescriptions for methadone and a receipt to show payment.

Not gonna lie—this picture did get me a little.

When I used to work as a merchandiser and cashier at Shoppers Drug Mart, like a young "Started From the Bottom" Drake before he became a pedo dweeb and reached the top of my "Canadian Artist" hit list, I'd see the effects methadone had on some of our pharmacy customers. They were afforded a additional care, and we knew not to disturb them.[60] Some of them made it through their treatment; others relapsed; others still vanished without a word.

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[60] Did this stop Anna "The Reese's Bandit" from stealing so many Reese Cups we had to install an extra camera above the candy aisle? No. But she had her circumstances.

Jeff, husband of The Reese's Bandit/our Jack the Ripper, once told me, while he was waiting for a methadone dose of his own (they both had their demons), that the "red juice" felt like battery acid going down, that you knew it would make you sick and kill the best parts of you, create a long nothingness while you outlasted the cravings. He was hard to understand because he was missing a few teeth, but I recall him also saying that methadone was in many ways a greater beast than the opioids it replaced, that it created a new addiction, that pharma companies wanted it that way. It'd made me think of Janice.

Before she was ever caught on camera, I had my suspicions Anna was the Bandit. I'd see her take her red juice and then waltz straight over to the candy aisle and linger, while Jeff, his red bulbous nose pointed at the ground, shuffled drowsily behind her. I never reported them because I knew that those Reese's were what they ate afterward to get the taste out of their mouths. They were both banned from the store. Don't know if they ever got better...

Picture my reaction, then, when the description at the end of the exhibit notifies us that this narrative is a fiction created by the artist to get people thinking about drug use. That the sister in question doesn't exist and that the artist used Reddit testimonies about drug use and methadone use to formulate an understanding of drug addiction—*AND* that it was less for humans and more to warn against drug addictions in all creatures, like her 7-year-old furbaby, Pigmalión, who has the beginnings of canine arthritis.

"Ah...," I begin, masking the antipathy. "It's neat how artists can manipulate their inspiration like that and apply it to other things."

"I wasn't expecting that from this exhibit," he says.

1/10 (insofar as "0" would mean the exhibit didn't exist or wasn't complete. Though, that might be better in this instance.)

We wander through to the second upper-floor section. I wouldn't say things are awkward. (I hope they aren't.) But we're firmly in that stage where we don't understand each other's cues or behaviours yet, so I keep lagging behind as he starts moving, or speaking too early before he's finished what he has to say. (He must be getting tired of me already. The sweat's coming back. I applied two layers of men's all-aluminum blue raspberry/mountain jizz antiperspirant, but I'm still sweating! 😖)

He starts: "I forgot to ask—"

"I wonder what this one—ope. Sorry."

"No, that's okay. You go."

"No, no—you go."

"Ah. I was going to ask if you were hungry. I neglected to mention that there are snacks on the first floor."

"I'm all right—thanks."

The second exhibit, from "emerging Meanjin-transplant artist and activist Zin Carruthers III," aptly titled *disABILITY*, gives us much to reflect upon. What we see are pieces of everyday furniture arranged in a zig-zag pattern—couches, chairs, stools—that appear more or less normal, except they've had their seats removed and replaced with white mesh. As if miniature trampolines have been installed in them.

I recognize one of the desks as an IKEA desk I had in my first solo apartment in Edmonton, back when I was living with six Indian guys because I couldn't afford any other accommodations after moving out of The Unforgiveable One's and couch-surfing for a while. (Bad times, bad times.)

The placard imparts that the installments "provoke an amelioration of the oft-invisible barriers handi-capable individuals endure in establishing their supra-personal sovereignty in a post-industrial, post-humanistic civilization," and that the artist "dares to posit that one's intrinsic value extends beyond the duration one may spend sitting in one's furniture."

The mesh symbolizes the many financial pitfalls of such a society. Neat...

We then see a follow-up plaque because they ran out of room on the first one:

"In the spirit of equitability, the artist chooses to disclose that fae are disabled, following a motorcycle repair accident." (I Google it, only to discover that this accident did little more than cost the artist *faer* left pinky.)

There's a wheelchair near the placard that can be used by guests to simulate the experience of disability, and if I knew Avery better, I would ask him to wheel me around in it, and I'd call him "onii-chan" and pretend it was a handi-capable dryer I was erotically stuck in.

Instead, we traipse through as we did before, stepping on each other's toes, interrupting each other's thoughts, misreading each other's cues.

2.5/10. (Points for time put in.)

We make our way downstairs to tackle the star of the show. (I'm losing him, aren't I?)

Back on the main floor, the party's in full swing. People are enjoying the complementary champagne (strict limit of one glass each, with the presentation of requisite drink ticket voucher) and potato chips (because what would a sophisticated art gallery event be without hexane-treated finger-food?)

I go for the neglected Orient-inspired shrimp-flavoured ones.

It's quite a mixed bag of attendees (😉) now that I'm getting a good look at things. Professors in oversized suits, escorting their diminutive Japanese, Mexican, or Thai wives around.[61] Or Zoomers/late-Millennials in high-waisted jeans, '90s band T-shirts (always fucking T-shirts!), and circular glasses—all carrying various forms of tote bags. (Friends of the artists?) Or older white ladies in expensive, too-tight dresses that show they used to have nice bodies before hitting the wall. (Probably the organizers?) And then a miscellany of randoms, like rum-shack T-shirt guy, who are likely related to the artists and came out of obligation.

"What's this exhibit about?" I ask. "I did my best not to look it up online. I wanted it to be a surprise."

"Truthfully, I couldn't tell you. I'm like you—I like the unexpected. All I know is that it's got works from local artists, as well as a few international names. And that it's called *Fragmentations of Whiteness*."

Could I have been mistaken? Surely not. There's no way Avery would be a *nu-male*, despiser of himself and his own kind? He doesn't have a patchy beard. He isn't balding prematurely. (His hormonal profile is ideal. Look at the balance of his skin, the firmness of his sternocleidomastoid, jutting out alluringly like that!) He doesn't wear graphic T-shirts. He doesn't wear glasses. He's not skinny-fat. He hasn't mentioned identity, pronouns, sexuality, *Ru Paul's Drag Race,* American politics—not even once.[62]

[61] You'd think they'd get tired of explaining things to people, but they love it, and because their wives have yet to master English, there's always something to elaborate upon, making him feel like he has purpose and her feel like she's got a powerful protector who knows everything.

[62] I'm scared of white men who speak so fervently about disliking being white. They

But Avery did ride a longboard to work. That's something a nu-male might do. And he does have exceptional grammar. Most "ally" sorts have passed through at least one post-secondary program...If he's a soiboi in disguise, a crypto-soi, there's no hope. I'm giving up on the male category—the *moid* category. No more.

We *begin at the beginning*...

The layout first shepherds us through an open gate adorned with miniature statues done in a Greco-Roman style. Only these statues have had their heads ripped off (the break points are jagged) and replaced with party balloons. I don't read the plaque for it, but I hear the couple next to us muttering about its purported anti-colonial meaning, it's tie-ins to their history of "whiteness" as a celebrated framework.

They look at me and nod that sympathetic, stomach-shriveling ally nod.

Avery doesn't try to read it either. (One point for "Normal.")

We're then presented with three plastic facsimiles of full-sized Greco-Roman statues: Venus Di Milo, Discobolus, and—God, nooooo—Apollo. Venus di Milo has had arms added to her to form a Nazi salute. Discobolus is chucking a migrant baby over a wall. (Okay, this is funny.) But Apollo? They've placed a denotation switch in his outstretched left hand and replaced the accompanying tree trunk and serpent customarily found beneath his right hand with the encasement for a drone missile (which has the words "ATTN: GLOBAL PEACE" written on it).

I don't dare read what iniquitous words they've conjured up for these, but we stand in front of them. "Thoughts?" I ask, meekly.

"They're bold takes. I'll give them that. There's a lot to think about here." (One point for "Soiboi"...)

[*cont.*] come into Cure all the time, see me, see the hair, the brown, muddy complexion, the mudball eyes, and feel the need to explain to me how they're displeased with some aspect of their identity—politics, slavery, current events. They tell me about black artists they like and ask me if I've heard of them. Why would I care if Sister Rosetta Tharpe played proto-rock and roll a while ago and was influential the rock movement? Eddie Van Halen puts her six feet under in any conceivable contest of merit anyway. Yes, I know who Basquiat was. Jay-Z's a modern-day poet-philosopher-king? *Sure.* That all means nothing to me. My life's still dogwater, no matter how much you supposedly care about me and my ilk now. Buy me a house, give me yours, or shut the fuck up. This goes for male feminists, too. I have two sayings for this: 1) An anti-white white is an anti-black black; 2) For every feminist, there's a male feminist planning to rape them.

Behind them and to the left is a mosaic of anti-minority news clippings from the late-19th and early-20th centuries. They're framed and arranged to resemble a world map. Most have headlines like "Negroes Strung up in Stanley Park" or "'Jim Crow Can't Go,' Say Leaders."

"How about this one?" I ask, even more meekly.

"I'm not sure this is as strong as the last pieces. Arranging someone else's work into new patterns isn't my idea of strong art." (Another point for "Normal.")

Hooking a left at the end of the hall, we come upon a table topped with ceramic cups and bowls. A miniaturized Apollo (again???) has been smashed to bits, his pieces strewn between the ceramics. At one end of the table is tall bust of an out-of-shape Zeus touching his own erect (2-inch) micro-chode, and on the other end is a caricature of a black woman, where the blackness of her face is old-cartoon jet black.

I deign to read the plaque for this one (I swear the word "BLACK" gets bigger):

"Masta's Table, Yo"

Frangioli Adebayo Keep

Dinner. To dine. Food. The suffusion of these concepts in the Euro-centric world have led to a smothering of non-Western gastronomic ideologies throughout our shared human history. We see examples of this in American colonial homes, where BLACKS were barred from the dinner theatre by whites and often impelled to sup in inhospitable conditions, outside or in their slave quarters, which featured a lack of refinement in their sanitary conditions due to long-perpetuated economic disadvantages.

This piece dismantles the histori-racial-megalamo-ethical framework of Western dining, with an emphasis on emancipating the contemporary BLACK from the hegemonic tyranny of white conceptions of regaling, victualing, noshing; replacing such terminology and customs with more equitable infrastructure that honours the eating and snacking habits and traditions of non-whites. At the same time, Keep illumines the underpinnings of sexual longing that the suppression of this tradition's creation engenders, bringing forth the fetishization of African mouths, with or without food in them. Crucially, Keep offers an invitation to dindin on change.

We then notice that the cups on the black woman's side are filled with grape-flavoured Gatorade, and half of them are upside down. The words "ateing," "greebing," and "dindins" have been written in green, black, and red crayon near some of the cups.

(I want to point at the black caricature part and say "me," but the jury's still out on whether or not he would find that amusing.)

"Mmm...?" I say in a tone barely registerable.

He thinks. "This is the first time I've seen such a concept in this light." (Another point for "Soiboi".....)

This could go on for ages. There must be another way.

I'm tempted to blurt out the N-word and gauge his reaction when two girls in band shirts appear before us.

"Avery!" one blurts. "Nice to see you here."

"Helena," he says coolly. "How've you been?"

"Oh, you know how it is. Slaving...I mean, *toiling* away, trying to make it here in the city."

Helena's the "pick-me" type (like, you could see her wearing a frog costume and acting like a weeb or singing indie-girl renditions of Creed songs. I have her pegged instantly.)

"Savoy," he says. "This is Helena and Gwen."

FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK

Gwen—as in Damon's roommate. UNO Gwen. Hot Caribbean Gwen.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh doessherememberdoessherememberdoessherememberdoessherememberdoessheremembrrr

Hide, hide, hide!

"Hi, Savoy," Gwen says.

"Hello," I reply, to everyone's shoes.

They're happy Avery made it out. They didn't think he was going to. He wasn't sure he was going to either. Helena chides him for not being active in

the group chat. Lets him know D'Angelo says it's cool if Avery still comes to the hangouts. Refers to Avery affectionately as "silly."

(I'm too fixated on the aglets of Gwen's sneaker laces and avoiding all attention to contend against Helena's obvious thirst. If Avery finds out about the Damon fiasco, I'm toast.)

Helena: *(To me, I think)* "Soooo, are you guys on a date?"

Me: "Wuh-wuh—"

Avery: "We are, yeah. Our first."

Helena: "OOooh. That so?" *(To me, again)* "Avery's an interesting one. Very demure. He's got that...*je ne sais pas*."

Gwen: "Je ne sais *quoi*."

Helena: "That."

They wanna know if I'm an artist, too. I can't get it out.

Avery: "She is. And she's exceptional, too. She drew a few sketches of me the other day."

Helena explains she's more into animation, like I give a whiff of a fuck. *That's where all the money's at.* Wants me to look at Gwen's African tapestry work. Wants to give me the link. *Really* thinks I should give Gwen's work a look.

(DÉJÀ VU AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!)

Avery: "Are you trying to sell her on that because she's also black?"

(Avery, no. Not you, too...five points for "Soiboi...")

Helena: "Of course not! Gwen's stuff is bitchin' is all!"

(Ah, to be a soul adrift. Alone in the universe. Alone, alone, alone. I'll be forever alone!)

Have we tried the fingerprint scanner yet? You put your fingers on it and answer a few questions, and it predicts how white you are. *It's pretty damned cool!*

Avery: (*???ly*) "We haven't."

Anywho, they're gonna keep making their rounds here. Helena might try to snag another bag of chips! Come say hey to the rest of them when we get a

chance—hee haw!—before the presentation! Please, Avery? I, *Sandra*, can come, too—if I *want*.

(*Sandra*...)

She LOVES my hair, by the way! Hoo hoo!

I'm ill to the point of wanting to dissolve. The stress of everything these last few weeks has finally caught up with me. The folks around us continue to linger and mingle and muse, but they may as well be insensate blobs, chunks of food circling the drain (me).

We could go all the way upstairs and sit in some of those godawful pieces of furniture, but I'll faint if I try to move. We find a bench.

"Do you need some water?" he asks. "Some food?"

"Just need to sit. Stress, sleep..."

Going for days without eating has the wonderful side effect of inducing anemia, but this feels more like stress-induced light-headedness. The thought of Avery being soi...favouriting *Female Warrior* on Netflix...wearing an Extinction Rebellion T-shirt at an environmental rally outside the gallery (our city's most popular spot for terribly organized protests)...

Five minutes pass; we don't say much. Patrons fritter, stretch, doddle in front of us, pucker and welt.

He eventually clears his throat.

"I'm sorry if this hasn't been terribly romantic. I tend to get lost in my thoughts when it comes to art."

I gaze up, queasily: "You used the word 'we' the other day—at Panacea. You said *we* when I talked about being an artist. What did you mean by that?"

"I went to art school—with Helena and Gwen and the others. For sculpting. I dropped out a few months ago."

(!!!)

(I want to know more about this—much, much, much, *much* more, but there's something else more pressing to attend to.)

"And the longboard. Why did you longboard to work the other day? I heard you mention a longboard."

"You heard that? That's my sister's old board. Ordinarily, I drive, but my car was in the shop."

(One last buzzer-beater point for "Normal." Final Tally: III [Normal] ~~HH~~ II [Soiboi])

(It's well and truly over...*Oware desu...*)

More silence.

Groups walk by using vapes, pointing at the *drank* cups, marveling at the monstrosities they call statues. I could go home now and put on a 10-hour video of gangster SpongeBob AI rap to numb myself. There might be some chicken soup left in the fridge if Dax hasn't violated it.

"How are you liking the exhibit so far?" he asks, facing me with anticipation.

It's worth one last ditch effort. There has to be a good moid left out there. One who isn't psychotic on the one hand or a pussy on the other. All those nights of surveillance. All those hours spent preparing...Apple News notification of doom...

"Honestly, this is some of the shittiest 'fine art' I've ever seen." I sense him reacting, but venture forth anyway. "I mean, you see things online about bad art exhibitions—people taping bananas to walls and selling them for millions, bejeweled skulls that get promoted by money launderers who've co-opted art and turned it into a skeezy business venture, *fucking—toques* mistakenly left on the ground that become part of the exhibit because people can't tell the difference anymore between art and literal fucking misplaced mass-produced clothing—but this is—this is insulting. I'm black—kinda—and even *I* hate this. I find it so openly demeaning. I get why Gwen would be for this—she's full, so maybe she thinks it celebrates her—but I hate this. And the chairs? The photos? God, this makes me want to stop doing art myself. I-I—"

He strokes his mouth. Drops his shoulders. "Thank fuck," he levels. "I thought I was the only one."

(*Grant to us, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness, and the serenity which comes from living close to thee!* 🌹🌹🌹) How could I ever doubt you?

"The gate!" I explode, catching my breath. "The statues!"

"I could see the fucking brown particle board poking out the side of the gate's pickets because the artist didn't bother to plaster them properly. Holy hell."

"The cups! The Zeus jerking off! Chode! Micro!"

"I've been on my best behaviour this whole night because I had no idea how you felt about politics in art. I knew you were an artist, and that you might have a twisted sense of humour, with the *Shrek* stuff and the Ponies—that made me do a double-take for sure; it was like the old DeviantArt stuff I'd see reposted to induce cringe, but done with more polish—but I didn't know. And I had no clue this would be *this*, so once I found out, it put me in a tough spot. Oh, man!"

We're both hysterical. More people are looking.

"The black woman mug thing! HAHAHAH!"

"So fucking *bad*," he says. "Was Keep *trying* to insult black people? Did you see the eerie smile? And the grape soda. I was trying so hard not to laugh. I had to keep grinding my teeth and thinking about dead animals to stop from busting a gut."

"I know everyone here secretly wants to call me a nigger. I just know it. Just say it, guys! I'm giving you permission! Call me a nigger!"

We can't help ourselves now; we've hit the point of incorrigibility.

"I've been giving the absolute worst responses all night," he says. "I couldn't find the words."

"Same!"

"It's 8:10 now. I think the presentation's in 20 minutes. Wanna go through the rest of the exhibit and roast it?" He pops to his feet and extends a hand.

"Hell yeah."

(Final-final tally: Eternally Based: ∞)

♀

The presentation starts at 8:35 PM *sharp*.

We're all huddled in the largest hall on the main floor, near the "statues" at the beginning of the exhibit.

The SSRI bats in the pencil skirts from earlier have formed a line against the far wall and cleared a space near "A-white-pollotician" (I've finally read its plaque) to serve as the speakers' area. In front of them stand seven "artists"

responsible for the conglomeration of bankrupt content Avery and I just went around undermining. (The other guests were *not* happy with us as we made our way through the rest of the exhibit. [I, despite being half, scored 13% on the "virtual whiteness test," and he scored 167%.])

The administrators start by calling up the curators. They give short speeches about the power of critical lenses and the value of self-determination and the huffing of farts.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

Next, the artists are summoned from underneath their respective bridges to accept praises. Dada Manchu is called first, the creature responsible for the desecration of Apollo. He's wearing a mesh shirt under two (TWO) wool cardigans, tattered jeans, Air Jordans (always the fucking Air Jordans).

"I went to school with him," Avery says, leaning in to me. (We're near the back of the crowd, close to the exit.) "He just released a documentary on his work process. I believe he's been in a couple national galleries this year."

Creep routine: engage. I utter, too loudly: "It came out two weeks ago. It's only got 76 views!"

Heads turn slightly.

"He was in some of my sculpting classes. He'd show up to every session playing indie music on a portable speaker. It was always from local bands he'd 'hung out with'—things that sounded like they'd been recorded in an uninsulated garage. The instructors would have to ask him to turn it off. One time, he told us he'd met Mária Bartuszová while on vacation in Italy. She died before he was born."

(Next up: Bertram "Bertie" Chofield-Nguyen, responsible for a piece of black-and-white beach towel fabric near the end of the exhibit. He/? takes a bow before reaching the front.)

"Did you want to go see your friends?" I ask.

"Not especially. I'm not sure we see eye-to-eye on much these days."

"Oh?"

Gwen's giraffe-girl frame is poking up off to the right. She's ensconced in a group of eight or nine people—Avery's art pals. I bet she's already told Helena and the others about the Damon situation. (Is that one of them looking over now? Clearly, they know.)

Eventually, Giorgio Z. Fairweather, Jabari Omari Dakari, c. h. qui, Rahni, Frangioli Adebayo Keep, and Pie Ecclesiastes are called up.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

I crack open and start eating a bag of shrimp chips.

And with that, the administrators begin their congratulatory speech:

"We would like to thank you all again for granting us your support this evening by showing up and showing your love. We're tickled to see that the arts are ever in your hearts. We couldn't have put this exhibit and this special evening together without the help of our sponsors, Vanopolis Bank, DL&G Consulting, Lexxon Oil. Their generous donations allowed us to procure these pieces from afar *and* commission a few from immensely talented local up-and-comers whom we know will shine brightly in the future."

(Chomp. Chomp. Chomp.)

Another one: "That's right. It goes without saying that a project of this magnitude, with such a capacity to breathe new life, engender paradigm-altering discussion and dialectic diversions, would require the help of patrons. And we can't thank our sponsors enough for facilitating and magnifying this creative discourse." (*Pausing for claps.*)

Clap. Clap. Clap.

First one: "So we have before us a bevy of talented minds that deserve our praise before we present their gifts, courtesy of said generous sponsors. Seriously, sign up for a trading account or crypto course tomorrow with Vandis if you're not already with them! Might we start with Dada Manchu, whose works we're currently in the thralls of here?" *(Gesturing like a Roman emperor.)*

Everyone around us seems spellbound with the presentation.

Avery *(blush)* is frowning.

"How long do you think this will go?" I ask.

"Hard to say. Half the time, the artists say too much; half the time, they say too little."

"But this guy pretends to know indie bands and made bad replicas of other people's works. Why would they let him speak?"

"That's the thrill of it. That's what today's artist lives for. The adoration. The interviews. Their turn to piss in the pool." He looks beset.

I offer him some chips, but he declines. I shovel a handful into my mouth and chew as loudly as possible. Chip fragments erupt from my mouth, cascading onto the gallery floors. The professor from earlier with the Pinoy Facebook-order bride shifts his weight and turns his head away from me in disapproval.

> "—And what do you want your appreciators to take away from your bold, inviting statues?"
>
> "Haaaaah. I suppose...it may be paramount to consider...that the modes in which we operate...the 'remnants' of the past...we've based our foundations on...are not...what they...*exude*..."

We've got six more to go.

Rum-shack guy's leaning against a wall. Looks like he might pass out. Whose disappointed father is he? Which one of these clowns does he pretend isn't a complete letdown and hasn't been since they traded in ice skates for smudging erasers?

Avery's *very* frowny.

> "—And that brings us to the work of Bertie—dear, dear Bertie! It's been such a delight to behold the vigor, the rawness behind your work! We've received so many compliments for it. What would you say guided your process as you were putting your piece together? What were the guiding *raison d'êtres*?"
>
> "Injustice."
>
> "Very boldly put! Anything to add on to that? What might one *miss* in your work?"
>
> ...
>
> ...
>
> ...
>
> "And Mx. Fairweather! What would you say was..."
>
> "*Therearesomanywaystoviewintersectionalityinthepresentdaysuchas-whenMichelFoucaultwroteaboutitinDisciplineandPunishmentyouknow-*

hesaidthatwe'rebeingwatchedbutthatkindofbeingwatchednessiwantedto-exploreherebutinthecontextmoreofthecontextmorelikeaboutracefollowin-guseverydaywhitenessbreathingdownourneckssothatpeoplewillactuallyra-toneachotherfornotbeingwhiteliketheysaythingslikeyoushouldn'tpronoun-ceitthatwayyoushouldsayitlikethisandithoguhtthatElizabethDurnin-githinkthatwashernameohnowaitthatwasbellehookswhosaidthatweallnok-nowinghowtobesolidiscenteredintheartofor..."

This fucking blows.

"Hey, do you want to leave?"

He sighs. "This is excruciating."

"Watch this—" I toss my empty chip bag to the side (I think it lands on Pinoy Professor's foot). Motherfucker, I've been waiting for this the whole night. Pro tip: If you wanna impress your beloved and be a menace and be fun and flip off the art world (yucky!), do the following:

> "BOOOOOO!" I let out from between cupped hands. "YOU'RE ALL FUCKING GLOWIES. NONE OF THIS IS REAL!!"

The presentation halts. Everyone looks nonplussed. Avery's attention is on me, but he doesn't look mad.

"WHO ORDERED THE SHRIMP CHIPS?" I roar. "ARE YOU GONNA EAT THOSE?!"

"Could we—uhm, excuse me?—whoever's making those—"

"BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Now they know it's me. Everyone's trained on us. Avery's friends, professor dude—everyone. I hear groans.

"Let's blow this clown show," I say to Avery.

I'm cackling as we walk—not even a fast walk—out of there. I stop to grab one last bag amid the confusion. Avery's cackling, too. Fuck 'em. They get what they deserve 😈.

II

19

Once Upon a Time in Savoyville (2)

"We are never so defenceless against love as when we let Savoy cook."
—Sigmund Freud

Edmonton had a roller rink on 134 Ave. NW called Rollie Pollie Inc., and every day after school, and sometimes on weekends, I'd take the bus there (4eva a bus rida 🤚🏾) to get some skating in.

Most roller rinks resemble hockey rinks, with the substitution of hardwood and mood lighting. Some these days have taken it up a notch and gone bougie with it,[63] with immaculate flooring and upscale eateries built in, boasting collard-peanut pesto salads and beet juice and açaí smoothies instead of hastily warmed-up Bagel Bites and yellow gunk-covered nachos (gunkchos) your parents (yours, not mine) would warn you not to eat.

Rollie Pollie was a step down from both of those.

The rink portion wasn't a rink—it was a section of flooring we understood was the skating area because it looked different than the black-and-white tile surrounding it. Interspersed throughout the floor were support beams wrapped in foam to protect the kiddies from concussing themselves on the steel girders.

Far from mood lighting, the light was like the light emergency exit signs give off—the edgeless glow you associate with power outages inside corporate offices. And the food? Heated Pillsbury mini pizzas they bought from the store like everyone else—and the nachos came coated in a synth-cheese you wouldn't serve to even the scummiest prisoner, let alone a dear civilian. (*Mega* gunkchos...)

This aside, Rollie Pollie's was 🅱️-🅱️-🅱️angin'.

Skate rentals were a mere $2.50 (but the nachos were $5???), and skating was without a time limit. If you got there at, say, 4:00 PM, you could, if you wanted to, stay until 9:00 PM to avoid having to cook dinner for your

[63] The hobby came back into vogue a few years ago when influencers picked up on it as a way of showing off their taut bodies.

deadbeat father while he watched his seventh consecutive episode of *The Sopranos* or *The Young and the Restless*, or having to track down your mother who had become a prostitute to pay for your mold-filled apartment on 92 St. NW after yet another impromptu move from some buttfuck part of the country.

I was there so often that one of the workers, Dustin—a high school senior from Jasper Place High School, who was cool in that way all older kids seem when you're just lapsing out of preteen-hood—gave me a pair of rental skates in a half size up. It was the first time anyone had given me anything in a long time, and I remember crying in front of him, which made me think he would hate me. He instructed me to make good use of them. He said they should last me at least another half year while my feet were growing. I thought he might've developed a crush on me because I'd learned how to straighten my hair the summer before and looked more like my Ukrainian-Irish half. But he never went for it.

The pair he'd given me were off-white and had "5.5" (I had big feet for my age) written in black marker on the back of each boot. They'd been used so much that the stitching was starting to come out and the insoles would peel up when you went to take them off. And the bearings were running thin, so they were squeaky if you turned at the wrong angle. But they were mine. They were everything. I put any sticker I could find on them (aggressively uncool for a 13-year-old to do), and I wrote *SAVOY* 15 times on each boot so they looked like sick skateboarding shoes with wheels on them.

Most skaters would come in as casuals (cazzies) looking to have some fun. They'd show up in groups, totter around, run into the poles. You'd overhear the guys teasing the girls and try to guess at who liked whom in the group. You'd picture yourself joining them so you could teach them to skate, and then they'd think you were *pretty sick, dude,* and invite you out for burgers and hangout seshes from then on, and you'd have to earn the trust of the one person in the group, Marissa, who didn't *altogether* trust you and thought you were weird, but you'd save her from a school shooter or a runaway car while having a bonfire on the beach, and she'd see she was wrong about you all along and become your best, mondo-hot friend who'd get you into the parties, ALL the parties! (This never happened.)

What you were really after were the solo skaters, the ones who knew the moves—toe-taps, heel spiral stops, salchow jumps, donkey kicks, crisscrosses. They'd come weaving through the cazzies with insane accuracy and grace, chaining together moves you'd expect of a figure skater. Despite the skirt

that revealed your stubbly legs, whose hairiness made it look like you had polycystic ovarian syndrome (you did, but you were too young to know), you tried the moves out for yourself to "Pumped Up Kicks" and the rest of Rollie's pop bops.

You fell an impossible number of times trying to do a sit spin. That was the joy of it. You were putting your muscles to work at the one thing you had a natural advantage at. And you loved it. For the first time in too long, living was fairly okay.

During another evening of dodging your broken family, you met Lisa, a cazzie, after she spotted you trying to nail your version of a spinning corkscrew. She wanted to know how you could keep your balance when spinning on one foot like that, with your heel kicked up. You told her you saw a guy do it a few weeks ago and had been trying it since. She said *nice* and complimented you on your thrift store Aéropostale jeans that were too big in the waist. You said *thanks—they're used*.

She was there with a friend of hers, Jordan, and she asked through her raven-black donkey fringe and Claire's lip gloss if you would want to skate with them. You learned that they were a year older, from the high school you might be going to next year (you could never be sure), that they were also there to avoid going home, that they were gonna hang out with some friends but those friends were getting into weed now, that they'd met in Chemistry class, that high school was and wasn't like it was in the movies, that Jordan got bad grades and liked watching pro wrestling (you knew of John Cena, Batista, Undertaker, which scored you immediate points with Jordan) and MMA, that Lisa was sad the goth movement was dying out because she wore so much black. You learned a lot of things.

You taught them basic strides and how to properly stop instead of running into the walls. They said you were cool for doing that. You skated around for a bit together, wondering how you'd managed to come across as cool to anyone.

They had to get going because they were gonna meet up with some other non-pot-smoking friends on Whyte Ave. and go shopping. They asked if you had Instagram (you didn't because you had no one to add on there and were anxious about what you'd have to post). You told them you only had Facebook.[64] They said that they would add you. You nodded. They left. You were stunned, but jubilant. You nailed that sit spin.

[64] You also had MSN still, from when you were seven, under the email "killer_smurfette_619@msn.ca," but you didn't tell them that.

You would receive two friend requests the next day from "Jordan Purdon" and "Evangelista Spider Lily," who had 512 and 674 friends, respectively.[65]

You would exchange a handful of messages with Jordan and like his posts about fighting and his friends, who seemed like nice enough delinquents—the type who would give you a hard time, slap the cafeteria spaghetti off your tray but apologize about it afterward. But you would become instant friends with Lisa, who gave you permission to call her by her full name, Evangelista, or her street name, "Spider Lily."

You'd take the bus to meet up with her and Jerrod two times to kick it at the mall or see a movie, and instead of watching the movie, you'd throw popcorn at the people in front of you and hide and then throw it at one another and be so loud a couple would get angry and report you to the theatre staff. Then, for no reason that needed to be shared, it would be just you and her a few more times after that.

You'd go to her house on Windsor Park after school one afternoon and slink past her parents as best you could after sheepishly introducing yourself[66] and head up to Evangelista's room.

She'd show you the studded belt she'd bought at Hot Topic and the band shirts she'd been collecting off eBay (Misfits, Grateful Dead, Panic! At The Disco), and the charcoal art supplies she'd been experimenting with, the pictures of her gorgeous friends near her bed, the Lucifer statue she received from a rando at the 104 Ave. McDonald's.

She would ask if you wanted to listen to any iTunes music because she'd downloaded the latest Paramore album and she wanted to see what you thought of it because you two seemed to like a lot of the same stuff.
You would say yes. She would tell you she loved "Fast in My Car" and "Daydreaming." You would misunderstand and tell her you daydreamed a lot, too.

You'd be amazed at the serenity of a proper room. The enticement it posed toward stability. And the pink walls! Unexpected.

She would take off her baggy black hoodie while Hayley Williams sang about having been put through the ringer. She'd take her undershirt off, telling you

[65] You had 212, only because everyone in your school added everyone else, no matter how little they knew one another.

[66] You were fraught around parents who seemed invested in their children's lives; you thought it abnormal that your friends' tones would politely enliven when talking with their loved ones.

she wanted to show you the new alt-J (Δ) tee she'd bought a few days after you'd met.

You would see the length of her back—hairless, unblemished—the faint trace of her ribs, the buds of her growing breasts, and you'd look away out of timidity. You'd compare the delicateness of her form to your rough exterior, your hodge-podge of colours, your general coarseness, your already saggy, ungrowing boobs, and be filled with an unassailable envy, longing.

She'd see you looking at her, see you look away, and come over to you once you'd seated yourself on the bed.

Hayley Williams would sing about driving fast in her car, being dressed in riot gear. You would lose feeling in your extremities. She would look right into your eyes and place a hand on your shoulder. You would be afraid. She would kiss you. You would kiss her back. (It was your first.) Hayley Williams would sing about not looking for violence, only fun. She would take her hand off your shoulder, finish changing, and turn the song off. You would sit, just sit, surrounded by pink and Lucifer statues.

After a while, you'd go home.

You would try to talk to her after that. You'd get a few short responses at first, then nothing.

You would monitor your friends list every day—until three months later, when you'd see that she had unfriended you.

20

Will the Real Whitman Please Stand Up?

"You look pleased," Maria says while funneling some replacement cake wedges into the display case (we're holding down the fort yet again at Cure, my favourite place to work 🙂), and I *am* pleased. So much so that I respond with "Aha! O, heigh-ho," which mystifies Maria, who has never beheld the full sperg side of me.

Life as a puppet of the international ventriloquist masters is much more tolerable when you have someone special in your life. It makes you capable of staring at a poorly designed photo wall no one uses without wanting to expurgate. Makes you kinda *like* the wall.

This must be why people allow these social and aesthetic atrocities to occur. They become so content with love that the entire world around them could crumble and they would thank fate for it. Their buildings could turn into faceless boxes, their healthcare systems could mutilate them, their communities could fall into disarray, their currency could inflate to farcical proportions and they'd stay lost in "spinny cherry blossom realm."

Maria must hear about our date. About our hanging out on the front steps of the gallery once we were done and our climbing up on the statues—the lions at the top of the steps—how we walked around downtown, stopping to grab donairs; how I learned little things about him, like that he speaks Parisian French, and how he used to box; how he studied architecture and Greek Revival styles before becoming a sculptor. She must hear about my darling Aesthetevery!

"Do you watch anime?" I ask.

"I've seen a couple. My ex liked the '90s stuff. He took me to see *Akira* at the Rio once. And I remember watching *Cowboy BeeBoop*. Was that the name? The space cowboy hunter show."

"Right, so in some anime there'll be a moment where a character acknowledges they're in love, or it'll be two characters facing each other, and they'll acknowledge that they're in love. The camera will, like, circle around them super fast, and everything will gleam, and the background will shift to a shimmering white pattern, or an expanse filled with cherry blossoms, and they'll be removed from the rest of the world for that minuscule, glorious instant. I had a moment like that with a boy the other night."[67]

"That sounds like a hell of a date."

(A customer approaches, but Greyston handles it.)

"It really was."

"That's so great, Savoy. It's hard to find a gentleman like that. Most of the guys our age are into fishing, guns, and *libertarianism*. Are you gonna see him again?"

"We've been texting back and forth a bit, but he hasn't asked me out yet. Is that normal?"

[67] So much for reining in the sperg routine! But what of it? Do not kill the cringe in you—kill the part of you that cringes!

"If he likes you, he'll make time for you. That's the golden rule."

"So you're saying I *shouldn't* start sending him memes of *Serial Experiments Lain* to get his attention?"

"Probably not."

Before she can give me any more advice, Bossman Rigatone calls out, 'Maria, I need-a you back ere. For ze ads."

Nasty to think about what might transpire back there...Why ruin a day like this?

Life is good! (🤑)

Other things deserve my attention.

Like the commission that "dontspreadonme" sent in at 3:13 AM for a caricature-style illustration of Donald Trump and Joe Biden licking the same vanilla ice cream cone on a tropical beach. ("Have them both smiling, and make Trump's bulge visible through his swimming trunks. Also, could you put one tree in the background with some coconuts hanging from it? Thx.")

Caricatures aren't exactly my thing. How long are their tongues supposed to be? How big can I make the cone before it gets too big for a caricature? Waffle cone? It would be much funnier to put them in swim trunks from hot brands. Biden in Burberry? Trump in Superdry? Maybe we'll draw a couple clouds for good measure. He paid the extra charge for 1-day delivery, so I'm gonna have to get to it as soon as I leave.

Enter Mr. Clemence, who tells me I look focused. "Planning out your next big heads-or-tails?"

"Not yet. The other one worked marvelously, though."

"Happy to have helped."

He opts for a cortado on my rec, and I opt for the Brazilian Santos beans.[68]

Bursting at the girlie seams, I gush about the date. While sifting through his wallet, he asks if Avery held the door open for me.

"He did at one point. Maybe at the donair place? We went through so many doors. It's a blur."

[68] Raphael cheaped out on buying the Yirgacheffe again, but this one's still solid.

"Well, he sounds nice enough to me. On my first date with my late wife, Eileen, I was so nervous I forgot to hold the door open to the diner I took her to. I thought it was over right then and there!"

This one's a quick pour.

"This type of drink is hard to draw on, but I could make you a bear, like last time. A slug, maybe?"

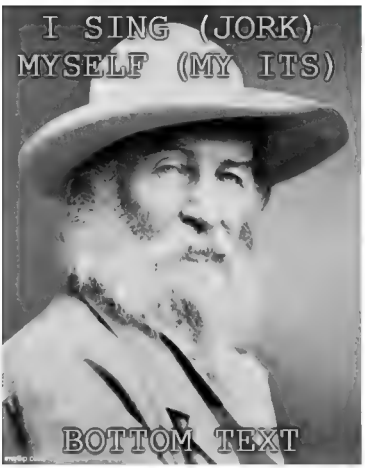
"That's quite all right."

"Hey," I say. "You read a lot of poetry, right?"

"You might say that."

"What would you recommend for someone falling in love?"

21



help understanding poem Anonymous
8 hours 268341 >>268347 >>268379
>>268385 >>268389 >>268390

a vustomer at the cafe i work at (i'm the porn girl) gave me a poem
to read and i wanna make sure i've understood it. i tried asking 4chan's / lit/ board, and some of the anons were helpful, but after a couple good replies they ended up calling me an illiterate monkey and an anti-christian agent of mossad for promoting secular hogwash, and then it turned into a shill thread for a self-published poetry collection with fake reviews on the back.

my dumbass can't stop reading this as if whitman was bisexual cause he keeps mentioning loving men and women. is he adressing someone, the reader, both? is it a love poem???

also, poetry thread i guess

Anonymous 8 hours 268347 >>268361

>>268341 (You)
Whitman included "To You" in the original "Leaves of Grass" under a different name. I had to read this one in school. I don't know how extensively he edited it for the version of LoG that followed. In my personal view, it's not so much a love poem as it is an acknowledgment of people. Whitman fancied himself a humanist -- so his deal was to try to show them their value in a way that wasn't attached to religious dogma or superficiality. It reads like he's trying to go deeper, right to the "soul," and "pursue" the essence behind the men and women around him. It's supposed to be uplifting. Not sure completely what it has to do with love, but that's my guess..

That said, he could have very well been bisexual. I picture him as a bratty bottom. Defs not a power bottom.

t. former Eng undergrad

Anonymous 8 hours 268361

>>268347
I see him as a side if anything.

Anonymous 7 hours 268366 >>268377

That's what you get for seeking advice from moids on moid poetry. I muh prefer Dickinson, the OG, the goat of all femcel poets. Success is counted sweetest is one of her best but I have like five collections of hers. She got the last laugh.

Anonymous 7 hours 268377

>>268366
>In actual fact, the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems crack jokes, make music -- all with love. In other words, create a magic world.

Anonymous 7 hours 268379 >>268401 >>268402 >>268409

>>268341 (You)
That "customer" is grooming you, girl. Protect yourself. What business does a customer have trying to teach you about love? If I were you, I'd start carrying pepper spray in your bag. He might try to attack you after a shift.

22

Pioneers, Meet Trinidadian Cuisine

D-D-D-Date-o #2!

We traipsed through Fort Langley cemetery. Sunday afternoon. Spring had begun to rip through the area, shocking the blossoms and buds into animation. I wanted to scream my excitement from the top of the adjacent St. George's Church.

He looked hungry. (I'm learning his cues.) I brought him Trinidadian curry just in case! (I know borger = good, but a bloke has to take a chance! And I wanted him to feel full as we read the tombstones of FL's mysterious pioneer founders.)

We removed the gear from my oversized gym bag and spread it out under one of the walking path's horse chestnut trees (*Aesculus hippocastanum*, fyi). Some squirrels tussled above us on the branches.

Got so high on the six chilis I put in the curry that I told him Winston's life story—coming here in '95 from Port of Spain, after working at a shipping company exporting fruits and saving up the money to leave because he wanted to see the world. And how he doesn't work now, despite having been a welder and a DJ, and how he loves *Young and the Restless*, and how I love Victor Newman, with his sexy, gravelly voice...

And how Winston's crazy ex-wife tried to steal his money.[69]

And about Quartz, my other step- or half-sister (he never told me if she was biologically his), who lives in Calgary.[70]

[69] Can't remember her name—Carrie?—Donna? He was a stepfather to her three kids. One of his stepsons found me online and tried to hit on me a few years ago.

[70] Her mom, Alicia, is also kooky. He said she was violent. Tried to poison his food once with ricin. Quartz is chill. She just had a daughter. I'd like to go meet both of them.

And then I told him about Janice. (The BBC fetish, the drugs, the everything...)

The blanket I brought was thin, an Amazon Basics algorithm-approved purchase for under $20. It was as if each blade of grass was poking through, burrowing into my backside.

One of the squirrels dropped a seed near my feet.

I apologized for being *blah-blah crazy*, for having a little sugar in me. Assured him I'm not a convict, and no one in my family is either. I'm just built different.

"I know what you mean," he said.

I panicked and pivoted: "I hold a lot of controversial opinions that are probably related to this, but most of them are from having to watch people hurt one another over and over again and never figure out why they're doing it in the first place—the regular person—the *regular Joe*—doesn't see these things—or if they do, they don't process them the same way, so I-I don't relate to people very well—they treat me like I have leprosy or I'm bright green or made of cheese. And I'm hairy, and people think I'm gay—or, like, a half woman—I sometimes feel like more of a guy—I—"

"Savoy, stop," he said. "It's rare to meet people who live as freely and as boldly as you do. We don't know each other all too well yet, but what I've seen of you already has me intrigued. And I haven't seen you as anything other than a woman since we met. Quite a gorgeous one."

(gjifsjgif goakdogdso gkok oKOOK !O!!1)

I got him kicked out of his art friend group chat. (He was already planning on leaving it.)

He used to go on 8chan before it got scrubbed off the face of the earth for the whole "school shooter" fiasco.

"Really?"

"Yep."

Me at some point, internally: "Please whip out your hogg. I swear I'm not a whore, and my love for you transcends mere libidinous whore-ry, but please, please take off your clothes. I want to bite you.

Him: "You got any plans for tonight? There's something I'd like to show you.

You might say it's the reason why I'm weird, too."

"No—I'm all yours."

(Summary: complete!)

23

You're in His DMs; I'm Over at His House Drinking Feta Water—We Are Not the Same

I'm inside his boy home in Kits (Juniper Grove apartment complex, which I was already intimately familiar with) an hour and a half later, after he drove me there in his restored '80s BMW that's so much better than Raphael's that he said *runs like complete ass and is probably falling apart but has real character*, after I showed him my "unexpected circus vibes 🤹" playlist (Mexican fiesta tracks, like "Damaso" by Gerardo Ortiz, and clown shit), my "CHATAHOOCHIE 🍑😈" playlist ['80s and early '90s country, like my boi George Strait, because "Strait from the Heart" is the best country album of the decade, and *you can quote me on that*—]), and my "uhm~!~!~i'm~!~!~healing~!~!~"playlist [oldies from the '20s and '30s, Lil B, Xaver Scharwenka's piano pieces, Gregorian chants] and I accidentally pulled one of the buttons off his console when I was adjusting the volume and he didn't yell at me! :))—and I'm elated he has more than a foldable chair as his sole piece of living room furniture and more than one plate but not too many plates and doesn't have a gaming console or towels on the ground and it feels like an artist's studio instead of an apartment and he lets me touch the hammers, chisels, sanding paper (each grade) while he asks me if I want anything to eat and I get lost in the stone and raw materials and busts and objects and miniatures on all the shelves and newspapers lining the floors (if he went into the bathroom, took a bunch of pills, and returned in a rainsuit, I would let him kill me) and he's got so many books he's started piles on the ground in front of the bookshelves and they've fanned out and toppled over one another like paint-store colour palettes and mixed in are reams of paper that bear scribble marks or a cursive I can't read from afar and I don't recognize many of the authors' names or book titles—Kevin Varrone's *passyunk lost*, Norm Sibum's *Gardens of the Interregnum* (???), Dennis E. Bolen's *Black Liquor*, *Extension du domaine de la lutte* by (—Hey! I know this one!) and I've forgotten to take my vampire girlie boots off (and no Rupi!) and the only other thing in the room is a digital piano and a cot

that's been tucked away in the corner by a few of the stands and the cot is so hopelessly artistic it belongs in a Van Gogh (🎨😖💦!) and I keep poking around at the papers and he tells me he used to be a poet and I gasp and say I thought he was a sculptor and ask him if he still writes and he says no and I ask why not and he tells me *Like, I was just making so much money and becoming so famous that I figured I'd give other people a chance* and I giggle because he's so funny and handsome and his arms—big, juicy, monkey-man arms—are bulging out of his polo shirt and I say *Seriously?* and he says *Getting into writing poetry for the fame and money would be like getting into underwater welding for the swimming practice. I still write from time to time, but a few things forced me away from it* and I wanna know *why* while I run my fingers over a tarp hanging over one of his projects and he says something like *Today's poets and writers are like the artists we saw at the gallery: energetic, socially conscious, and fully incapable of seeing beyond themselves* and I say *Mhm* while dreaming about walking along the Pont Royal while holding those lusty, bulky forelimbs, whispering to him in French (his: exceptional; mine: haggard but adorable), *incapablement* (is this a *mot?*) of waiting until we get back to our apartment—*our* apartment, on Rue Jean-Baptiste-Ferdinand So-*et*-So, and he says *The three components an artist functions on are consistency, thoroughness—you could call this obsessiveness—and vision. The poor artists excel in one of these, the decent ones in two, and the world-beaters, the all-timers, in three* and we're redoing our Parisian apartment, a spot of redecorating, freshening the wallpaper to brighten the room and pay homage to the space, tearing strips, one at a time, of the dated floral print the elderly couple we bought it from said was put up by the couple who owned it before them, and he runs me through the consequences of each combination, saying *consistency + vision = lazy genius; vision + thoroughness = "what if" career; consistency + thoroughness = grinder/jobber/bum/the artists we saw*, see Avery maybe peel for me a bouquet from the wall and present it on one knee, and I might dollop royal white on his lithe, powerful, forbearing fingers, and he might let out a laugh and let those fingers linger, linger upon my neck, and I might meet his gaze and glance away and be taken in and hear him laugh too and find colour rushing to his cheeks and giggle in that way women do *We can't expect the talented artists of yesteryear who fought for the values that dominate art today to suddenly give up on their ideals—the John Bartons, the Eileen Myleses, the John Currins* when they're yours yours all yours and say things like *tu es tres charming* (sp?) and giggle again in triumph in reverence of, over life love philosophy heartache deconstruction *Those artists, the artists of old, needed to test a grand unyoking. They believed we could free ourselves through liberalism of method and spirit. We now see it's failed. The vast majority of those active today have jumped on this movement after its crest,*

and as a result the slow plaintive surrender of one to another to be killed forewarned softly and bring my hand to his face and his face to mine and and bring face to hand and face to face and

Am I losing you, Savoy?

"Yep." God, his arms. And his ginormous, sexy theoretician brain...

"Apologies. I tend to get carried away with my art disquisitions. Let's talk about something else."

I snap back. We're standing in the middle of the room. The fantasy was just getting steamy!

"No, no—I'm listening. It's my ADHD. It looks like I'm not listening, but I am. Why did you quit poetry?" (I've wiped my still-salivating mouth.)

"It's complicated, but in a word: it involved not being able to write faux-19th-century stuff for the hyper-traditionalists out there, those who would think poetry isn't *poetry* unless it's written in thrice-encoded tetra-dactylic monorhyme, nor for the people who would think contemporary poetry is a see-through soapbox for them and their fellow dorks' opinions."

"What sorts of things did you write about? I know you were on 8chan—the rarer 4chan—so you're a certified h8er like me. You should write a new Elliot Rodger incel manifesto in poetry form. I'll write the femcel equivalent."

"I do remember reading *My Twisted World* back in the day," he says. "It was really fucking funny—especially the part where he talks about wanting to stop the world from having sex. And to answer your other question: Satire. A society doesn't need a thousand lancings, but it does need the occasional impalement to see what it's made of."

"Have you heard of Crystal Cafe?"

"Sounds vaguely familiar. What's its deal?"

(I *could* tell him I've been posting about him and our dates on there [all good things, of course!!!] but he might not like that, so I'll keep quiet.)

"Wait, if you wanna write satire, *My Twisted World 2: Electric Boogaloo* could be that book. We'll have you chudmaxxing in no time."[71]

[71] Chud poet Avery would be hot! Pessimist Avery would be hot. All Averys are hot. Somewhere out there, there's a lame-ass Marvel-style multiverse with every form of Avery, and I'm cranking my hogg to each one.

"That, I could come out of retirement for."

I'm starting to get drawn back into the smell of plaster and damp newspapers. Falling asleep here would be like having the most restorative nap of your life in a library that was under construction. Drifting into the downy embrace of midday heat. And how nice it'd be to doodle in a space like this (while being cradled in his arms? 💙), to paint again, for the first time in years. To try something *mature* again, like when I was first starting out, like a...?

He offers me food, even though we ate an hour ago. He only has meat and pierogies because he largely eats for utility (my darling carnivore). And the basics for a Greek salad. Do I like feta?

"Love it. You know the brine stuff it comes in? I used to drink that."

"Savoy, I mean this in the nicest way: You're a mess."

He's leaning against the countertop of the kitchen, rummaging through his fridge. It's gross when most men graze in front of the fridge and thereby transform into methane-generating steers, nugatory pasture-grazers driving up the $C0_2$/global stank levels. This isn't one of those cases.

It's a miracle he let me into his apartment. I might very well break the femoid curse. I might very well become lovable. We're on pace, lads. (Cahm on, Savengland! Score sum fackin' goals! [cute boys!])

"Wait, before we eat—what did you want to show me? And I wanna know which combination you are as an artist!"

"Oh. Right. Over here." (He beckons me over by the bed 🫀👄)

"I have vision and thoroughness as an artist—but not consistency. Because of that." (He's pointing at a device on the ground by the head of his bed.)

"What's that?"

"It's a CPAP machine."

"Don't old people use those." (ARGH! RUDE! I'VE INSULTED HIM!)

He laughs. "Pretty much."

(He's sitting on the bed now. I'm standing. I want to SIT! Brush again his leg. Feel HIM! But I must stand. This seems serious. He's opening ❤️ up 🔥🔥)
"You said at the cemetery you were a weirdo. This machine right here is why

I'm one, too. When I was a teenager, I was injured in a sporting accident. My nose got crushed. Prior to that, I was about as well-adjusted as they come—good family, healthy physique, great grades, popular. I thought I'd heal up and get back to normal, but then a month went by, a year, two years. I'd get these splitting headaches, and I was down to about two hours of sleep a night. No specialists had any answers for me. I had to hide it from everyone. In those days, I could go without sleep. I'd look vampiric, and I wouldn't eat much, but I was functional. I managed to have fun and be a teenager, but there are large stretches of time I simply don't remember anymore. And as I hit my 20s, I began to see that my nose was severely chewed up inside. I'd wake up 12, 15 times a night, gasping for air. On some days, my mind would be completely shot. The CT scan they took of my sinuses made it look like my nose had been put in a blender. I've had five surgeries on it to fix my breathing, but none of them have taken, and likely never will." (😰) "I can't tell you how many relationships I've had to surrender as a result." (Thousands? He must've been getting offers every day.) "An illness like this leeches off all aspects of your life, to the point where existence becomes little more than a string of concessions to grief. When you've had to contend with your own mortality every night since the age of 14, had to reach down into your own skeleton to pull out some reason to persist, you change. The so-called little things stop mattering—celebrity gossip, gas prices. Everything ends up being...*funny*. You start making jokes of everything. Maybe you become a little hedonistic. Maybe you don't. But regardless, everything along the way is painfully, irrevocably funny."

He *does* understand the struggle...

"And," he continues, "once you reach that point of withdrawal from yourself, or all-encompassing irony, if you're weak-willed or selfish, or unequipped, you turn on people, sometimes entire groups at a time, use them, spite them for your temporary gains and thrills, because you haven't reconciled your own soul's partial flight, its first step out the door. This is resentment—true resentment—not the surface-level bullshit from whiners online who think not being able to own a house in a major city is enough to make a person go full Joker,[72] those people racing through nihilism, hedonism, irony and jumping to resentment because it seems the thing to do. But if you can see beyond yourself and always keep in mind universals, you tend toward a humanitarian approach—you want to see those around you thrive, avoid the too-common modern pitfalls—the debt-slavery to centralized banks, the artificial culture wars, the siren song of globalized trade—the greater forms of deception we see all around us now, when you know you as an individual

[72] Joker referenced!!!

won't be there for your effort's culmination. This condition will be the death of me one day. It's an eventuality I've long since come to terms with. And even though I'll never be able to go back to being a supposed 'normie,' I want to use my remaining time—however long that may be—to leave something of value in the world, to help lead people toward healthier, balanced, beautiful lives. That's all I can offer now, until what's left of me gives out. I see no greater human enterprise than that. And it might be nice to have someone there alongside me as I try. Someone who *gets it*. They're so hard to find." (😢) "Anyway," he says, placing his head in his hands, "thanks for listening to my sick guy Chud Talk."

(Oh, Martyry...I'll save you!)

"That was probably a lot to throw at you. Best to get it out in the open sooner rather than later. I'd fully understand if you didn't want to pursue this any further. It's a lot to handle in the long-term."

(NO! I can save you!) I'm making my move. I join him on the bed.

"*No one cared who I was until I put on the mask...*"

"What?"

(Uh oh. The joke didn't land.)

"L-L-Like Bane—y'know. The mask. CPAP mask."

"Ah. Right. Hah. Yeah. Haven't heard that one in a while."

(Fuck.)

"Did you know Estelle at your work loves you?" (What am I doing?)

"Huh?"

"The ABG girl at Panacea. She touches you all the time when you're working together. And she gives me nasty looks whenever I show up at the café."

"Estelle has a boyfriend—Dallas. I've met him. Seemed nice enough. What does that have to do with anything?" (I knew it! That stupid whore had a boyfriend the whole time and was feelin' up my mans! RAH!)

"Uhhh...I-I was trying to say that, clearly, women still like you—enough to try to cheat on their boyfriends with you. I mean, I would. Not that I cheat!"

"*You* would?"

"Y-Yeah..."

(*doki doki doki doki doki doki doki~~*)

"I have a sneaking suspicion you might try to kill me in my sleep one day, but you're the only type of girl I could see myself with anymore."

(**Inexpressible demon-girl-in-love ravings**)

He moves his hand to my leg. Not to be gross, because that's unladylike, but I'm fairly sure I've splooged onto his sheets already. Too anxious to check.

Before I can estimate the size of the puddle I've left, he kisses me, his thinner, tighter lips fitting neatly over my baboon-girl top lip.

We come apart again.

I

cannot

speak

!

( )

"I hope you don't think I brought you back to my place just to tell a sob story so you'd let me kiss you. But I've wanted to kiss you for a while."

"Gheuhgghhg ah—guhgh h!"

"You good?"

"Guh huh!"

"Good. I'll make up that salad. Oh, and there's something else I wanna show you. It's under this covering here. Meeting you for the first time made me think of my favourite painting from the Musée D'Orsay in Paris. I decided to do a re-envisioned sculpture version of Guillaume Dubufe's '*Esquisse du plafond*'—the staging of it was ridiculous to contend with at first, but I believe I've got it licked. And I've got a book for you from a guy by the name of Emil Cioran. Knowing you, you'll get a kick out of it—"

24

Now Serving Student #69420

Basking in Avery's effervescent glow that day, and witnessing his interior and exterior beauty (I kissed him—I *kissed* him—I keeesed him!—and he didn't run away or leave me in silence afterward! He he!) got me thinking: What if a nigga didn't have to rot, fr? What if a yung hustla like me could turn her/their (maybe just *her* from now on? 🫠) life around?

I woke up earlier than usual yesterday (11:00 AM) and decided to head up to campus to speak with an academic advisor about what it would take to re-enroll at SFUBC. Visiting an academic advisor is easily one of the most awkward things you can do as a student. That's (part of) what kept me away for so long.

You've got the online booking, the emailing back and forth.[73] The silent, electronic judgment.[74] There's no way for them to see the circumstances behind a failed course or a string of absences. They can't picture you ballooning up to 175 pounds during a global *plan/scamdemic* (wake up, sheeple! 🐑🤪), skipping class because a Discord friend of yours alerted you to the fact that your one true ex-boyfriend, the only real boyfriend you've had in your life (remember, cheating stupid-head Bernard doesn't count), the one whom you still have an active restraining order against and whom still won't leave you alone, outed himself as a homosexual online and was looking to lavish on new male lovers ("preferably a sub twink") more of the money from the insurance payout after you nursed him back to health post-crash—which he, one more time, didn't give you *a single red fucking cent of*—and that this caused you to spiral to the point of missing two straight weeks of class, including three major labs you couldn't make up because you were too afraid and autistic to explain what had happened to your professors, and they likely wouldn't have provided you any special allowances anyway because the school values tuition fees and conveyor-belt academic models over charitable, humane ones (despite claiming to champion *my* type of person—what do you have to say to that, huh, SFUBC?)—

[73] Had to reset my school email password, which took six hours, 'cause I couldn't remember what I'd reset it to the last time (turned out to be "DEMONTIME13$").

[74] You know they're looking up your case file, screening your grades, forming pictures of you in their head as they prepare for the meeting—and this is the only way to do it now that they no longer see you same-day.

So the counsellors don't always get a good sense for what's really going on.

But I was in a good mood. A fantastic mood.

I was hoping they'd have one of those kids' activity centers you see at banks—where you could sit and move the wooden blocks up and down the coloured metal poles, shift the wooden cars along the pre-arranged tracks, spin the numbered blocks—but they only had a few magazines on an end table, so I read about homemaking instead. (Roman shades are going to be so *hot* this season. They provide your home with a *classic feel*.)

Shortly, Mai Li[75] called me into her office/HR prison cell. We exchanged pleasantries, and I gave her what I was looking to do. Here's the rundown of what she told me in response, vro:

- I've accumulated 52 credits towards my Bachelor of Sciences degree (some of which were transferred from an Alberta institution)
- I was on academic probation for two semesters until I was forced to withdraw with a final GPA of 1.2 (this made Mai Li 3.0 wince)
- Since you can only enroll in SFUBC's Back on Track program within one semester of your being forced to withdraw (no longer an option for me :s) I have two forms of recourse:

  #1: Transfer to Dougie College, a.k.a. "Dougie Daycare";

  #2: Complete the Withdrawal Under Extenuating Circumstances (WUEC) application I've been putting off for eons.

- "The imperative component with WUEC applications is you must provide outside documentation to support any claims to medical distress during the semesters you would like to expunge. You can expunge up to 3 semesters. In your case, doing so would adequately restore your GPA back above the minimum requirement of 2.0. The primary drawback to this is that you may lose some credits for courses you successfully passed. This would lead to a loss of...8 credits, according to my calculations." (🤖)

Mai Li tells me if I am still experiencing hardship, including, but not limited to, mental health issues or safety concerns at home or with a partner, I am welcome to see one of SFUBC's "student happiness" counsellors in the wellness clinic three stories down. They are very discrete. They are provided to assist students through their issues. They cannot presently offer

[75] Bob haircut, Reitmans outfit, robot wrapped in desiccated human skin.

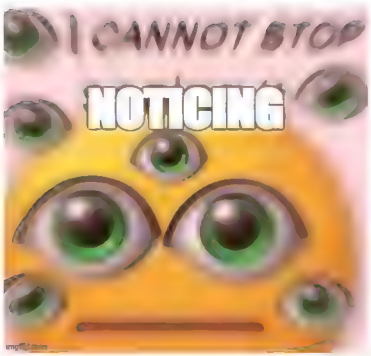
comprehensive psychological treatment. (Me: "It's cool. I don't believe in therapy.")

All in all, not an unproductive meeting.

I then went to the cafeteria, filled a tray with salt-and-pepper chicken wings, and tried to picture what life on campus would be like again.

Didn't seem too bad.

25



Thoughts on this? Anonymous 5 hours 278994

Came across this "documentary" on YouTube last night. It's supposed to be about "toxic" online culture (srs bznz) for women. Anyone else seen it? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfI-jnfjaNjfl=lebreadtuber1

Anonymous 5 hours 279020 >>279129

It's just incel discords and chatrooms with a couple femcels shown and they pretend those users are femcels, it's not real

Anonymous 4 hours 279129 >>279156

>>279020
Basically this. So many of the messages they highlighted absolutely REEKED of moid brainrot. The loli justification stuff was the giveaway for me. The moid brain does everything it can to justify loli degeneracy. When anime started picking up here in the west, the moid would find it "so weird" and pretend to "ironically" like this pedo shit in order to suss out whether or not he could get away with it. In the 2000s and early 10s, this started a competition to see who could push things the furthest with this "ironic" fetish as they tried to out-bro and out-gross each other, and now, they don't even hide it. They're not being ironic anymore. They like this stuff, and they've finally reached a place where it's so prevalent in media that they can openly claim it and show off their fetish. No femcel is going to write a treatise justifying jerking off to "cunny" like that one user did. Fucking disingenuous garbage.

Anonymous 4 hours 279138 >>279212 >>279255

I'm sick and tired of people making these sensationalist documentaries on us, like we're the problem with the interne. All they did was shadow a few distraught normie girls and the usual chan types.

Anonymous 4 hours 279156 >>279219

>>279129
they did studies to try to differentiate between actual CP pedos and cunny/loli/jailbait fans and they only found a few criminological differences between those who watched and used CP and those who were into loli media. They found that the main differences between the two groups were the language they used and the culture surrounding their interests.

change the language = dissolve the barriers = show the similarities = expose the pedos

Anonymous 3 hours 279201

Watching this is gonna mess up my algorithm, I don't wanna give them my views

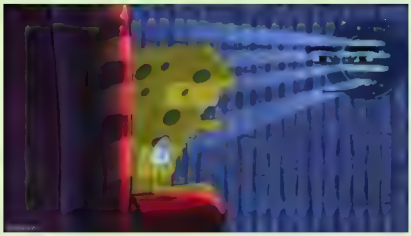
Anonymous 3 hours 279212 >>279235

>>279138
i'll never understand why girls hang out with incels or extremists or shaddy loli loving moids like this. these guys glorify national tragedies and start stupid online campaigns to get people in trouble with real world implications. femcels aren't naturally dangerous (they're not the ones shooting up schools,) and so it's gross that they get lopped in with actually dangerous (all men are dangerous) people.

these girls are being groomed by moids to accept their behaviour and justify it like some sort of deranged parasocial trad wife gf who would happily let her husband go off to fight the hun or the foreigner or the politician who was TOTALLY DESTROYING THE COUNTRY!!!!1! i want to shake them so bad and show them they deserve to be treated better.

also, the Mitski thread stuff they showed about her being a psyop was really funny.

Anonymous 3 hours 279219



>>279156

Fujoshis are the most oppressed class...

Anonymous 2 hours 279235 >>279239 >>279249 >>279255 >>279259 >>279265 >>279281 >>279303

>>279212
i'm pretty sure my roommate is into loli because every girl he brings over gets progressively more childlike. he's getting older, so the girls he used to bring over to the apartment who were hot don't want him anymore (he plays video games all day and eats all my food and has diabetes, so he's pretyy fat these days) and the ones that do are super weird a lot of the time. sometimes, he brings someone by who's still hot, and i usually stay out of their way unless he's pissed me off recently (one time, i told one he didn't wash his hands, and he got so pissed at me afterward). that said, i don't think he's a pedo (i pray not), and i want to try to help him grow up because he used to be cool when we first met, and somewhere under there, he has potential. his brother is really hot and has his life together, and they're full brothers so it's in there somewhere.

plus, i just met someone who used to hang out on those sites but isn't weird and rapey (i know what rapey guys are like) and mostly did it because he was bored and wanted to learn about all forms of humanity, what made them tick so the guys in the video probably need more direction so they don't rope foids into school shooting plots. But i dunno. maybe some of the girls want to be there.

Anonymous 2 hours 279239

>>279235 (You)
Pedophile moid detected. You and your sick roommate need help. Does he pass the girls to you when he's done with them? Why do you come on here and pretend to be women? Just leave.

Anonymous 2 hours 279249

>>279235 (You)

It's over for scrotes like him, they have nothing to offer but to shit everything up for the rest of us, you should tell him that. and this other creature your talking to was 100% a groomer back in the day, he sounds fucked.

Anonymous 1 hour 279255

>>279138
Right? This is the fourth one I've see come out in the last year.

>>279235 (You)
>I'm pretty sure my roomate's into girls who look like cartoon kids
>B-But he's not a pedo, I can fix him!
KYS

26

Dax Attack (2)

Once I'd returned from campus, Dax spotted me texting Avery on the polka-dotted Craigslist couch in the common area and asked if I wanted to continue our *Life Is Strange* playthrough. But before that I made a nefarious tea that consisted of crudely cut pieces of organic ginger and too much (also organic—I ain't no glyphosate girl) orange pulp in hot water. And Dax was hungry (surprise, surprise), so I whipped up grilled cheese[76] sandwiches with the multigrain bread I'd made in a bread machine I'd salvaged from Value Village a year prior after overdosing on TikToks about the dangers of grocery store loaves.

For the first time in months, we made use of the miniature patio table near the kitchen. We ate while shooting the shit.

Dax had succeeded in wearing Yngali down the other day by convincing her to go out with him post-shift. They went back to her place in New West and watched *Madagascar*, and she smoked some weed (he declined) before he "kinnna fugged her" (😑) while her two roommates attended an 18+

[76] I used a nutty aged cheddar for mine and two Kraft Singles slices for his, by request.

aquarium night where they serve you mimosas as you watch the belugas and otters and jellyfish yearn for open waters.

Afterwards, she asked if he liked to party and if he'd tried anything harder than weed before. She was seeing a Russian guy who could get Dax krokodil if he wanted, or fentanyl, MDMA, prescription meds. He said no, that people with diabetes probably couldn't do drugs even if they wanted to (for all his faults, Dax is not a druggie, unless string cheese and Primes count). So she told him she had somewhere to be, and he took the SkyTrain home. She hasn't spoken to him since. But it was okay, he said, because she was *defs too manic* and he wasn't sure she was that hot anyway.[77]

I told him he didn't need her and her put-on accent. That if he got serious about things, got a haircut, and bathed more than once every fourth day, he could find a girl that didn't look 12, or didn't hate mud—or didn't try to rope him into becoming a fentie fiend.

A few other highlights: He'd grinded it out on *Final Fantasy* and earned the "Tyrant's Attire." (Huzzah...) He spoke to his mom and brother for the first time in a month. He skipped only three classes in the last few weeks. He had been studying Kant's categorical imperative as a part of his ethics class and thought it was cool that Kant became so well-known despite never leaving his house. (Described it as "a huge W.")

When he asked how things were with me, I mostly gushed about you-know-who (Dax knew I'd gone to his house, but I hadn't had time to give him the complete story). I described the afternoon in the cemetery, the evening at his place—how close I'd come to turning it into a bad run. I told him about the statues, the poetry, the kiss. For once, Dax didn't zone out. He *actually* listened and made eye contact. And because we were on the subject of philosophy, I mentioned Avery had loaned me Emil Cioran's *Trouble with Being Born*. I went to my room to get Dax the book and show him some of the aphorisms I had singled out.[78]

I read him some while I made him a second grilled cheese. Told him I'd commenced the process of coming back to SFUBC: "Something about seeing Avery work as hard as he does got me thinking about doing the same for

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[77] Just how bad is the economy when a drug dealer's side hoe is having to live with roommates, work gigs at a comedy club, and recruit new clients by offering them sex???

[78] My system was to put a circle beside the ones that were moderately attention-grabbing, a check mark beside the ones that were strong, a double-check beside the great ones, and a triple-check beside the monster mama-jamas.

myself. My sleep's still fucked, and I'll probably miss class frequently to start because of it, but it might be worth trying. It's not like they're gonna let me become a botanist without the certification, so I guess I have to get a degree. Everything's going up in price—those Kraft Singles used to be $3.99—I just bought them for $6.99 at the grocery store on campus—what the fuck is that?—and AI is gonna replace digital artists like me real soon, and you know cheap companies are gonna prefer to cut costs and go with the fake, shitty, *soulless* art, and Raphael could let me go any time, so what other choice do I have? We're almost in our mid-20s now. We're already starting to be forgotten about. The scintillating aura that once surrounded us is gone. The people telling us we were the next generation and that we had big things waiting for us—they're not saying that as much anymore. Like, *good luck—you'll never own a house. You'll have to compete against a globeful of foreign students. You'll have to work nine jobs while you do try to study. No one will have any religion but "buy, buy, buy," and you'll always be inundated with politics! And the media will hate you the whole time, despite pretending to like you if you're black or kind of black! Good luck trying to get anyone around you to take anything seriously!* Fuck. I'm starting to not like floating so much. Maybe I wanna live. Really live. The way we were supposed to get the chance to. The way only a poisoned generation can."

(His eyes were starting to wander again while he ate.)

I asked if he knew what he was passionate about yet.

"Eiiiiuughhgh...Eiguh...Wew" (He was talking while chewing.) "...I onno, M*A*HWN!" he said. "I mean, video games are fun."

"Maybe you could put more work into the YouTube channel? I saw you haven't posted a video in over a month. They recommend that creators post as frequently as possible to gain a real following. Do you need help with video ideas? I could come up with a dozen or so with you."

"Eiugghhhh...I had an idea for *one*...It's kindaaa like one of those meme *Elden Ring* runs. But..."

(*Sandwich: felled.*)

I offered to help with editing, generating subs. Ranted about how we're not a lazy generation, how we could move to Italy, France, Spain and live in one of those cheap homes promoted on IG. I could bring Avery; Dax could bring a whore with which to frolic in the fields. Ranted about the great #SheEO deception and how the vast majority of us would be much happier in fields,

taking care of children, doing art, building communities, picking berries for spare change. ("I have big dreams, but I would give up botany if it meant I could have a family and be content for once. I'd use my botany alchemy to make it so we could pick more berries—there'd be endless berries for everyone to pick, and they wouldn't give you glioblastomas or make you infertile like our produce now!")

"Eiiughh..."

Challenged him to do some push-ups with me.

Did 15 beside the table. He didn't join me, but it looked like he was thinking about it for a sec.

"See?" I continued, breathing fast, holding the push-up position. "There are some people out there who have physical illnesses that prevent them from doing things like that. Paralysis, MLS. Neither of us has that. There are some people out there who have invisible illnesses, yet many of them still fight and do brilliant things. You can, too, Dax. I know you can. You need to find it in yourself."

"Eighh...Yuh...Tha migh...Huh..."

"Think about it. Okay? Now, let's go see if we can go fuck more of Max's friends up."

We played for two-and-a-half hours. We menaced everyone but Frank, the town's heart-of-gold drug-dealer.

When we were given the choice of administering poison to an alternate reality Chloe who'd been paralyzed, I made Dax give it to her, but I think I cried while he did it...

27

Avi, Baby ❤️ (Brilliant Guy) 🤓 🙋🏽‍♂️

Today, 11:01 AM

Your "Torono yutes" impression?

Like the tiny teenagers they interview in the mall with the fucked up fits? I've had people send me a couple of those 😂

das da one fam

pree da drip crodie

😂 fam da yutes round here fam dey don wahn nun a dis fr dey be seyin dey do but wallahi dey don

top left, Drake is my mortal enemy fam styll, in da 6ix, broksi's a sweeterman but in da batter boi way, ya no? hearin is shieet on da radio in da shops fam it cheeses me big tyme fr like he be sayin he hangin with dem cyatties baggin bare shawties but most a dem be dutty ah merked ahlie? fawad his profie quick time, see dem on his stories. tinkin he a gyallis sendin gyaldum pics a is phallus hya! marved behaviour fam bawtymon shiet aye got a few mans some true hoodmans dat're tinkin a rollin to is crib an duppyin im fr, yellow tape an all that shiet.

😂 they kinda sound like my dad, but moreretared.

Inshallah, Drake will be stained and duppied, fam. I also dislike hearing "Hotline Bling" and "Sicko Mode" and "God's Plan" in every damned store in the city.

say less, shortie

have you seen his son's music video?

The kid he had with that pornstar is now making music? Man, that's tough.

Break's about to end—I'll catch you quick times, dime piece.

4:13 PM

how'd your shift go

sorry for keeping you up again last night btw w the conspiracy stuff, i just can't believe the queen was a gnostic princess baddie

hope you DIDN"""T let babygirl suck your blood. she's out to get you!!!

Think I finally fell asleep around 5:00 AM. Got some sculpting done in the wee hours.

Wasn't too bad. Aman gave me some kouign-amanns to take home. (He says hi back and wants you to come into Pan again soon.)

And Estelle failed to sink her teeth into me.

you're so good at what you do!@@

aman is so nice. seriously he's one of the best bosses i've ever had. i would come work there in a heartbeat but i don't wanna cramp your style and i think abg would throw a fit.

He's easily a top 3 boss for me.

Something about the idea of you working at Panacea does sound nice.

By the way, how's Cioran been treating you?

someone needs to get this emil-ah nigga an anime body pillow STAT fr

Hahahah

You might be the first person in history to have said that of him.

i've had to look up a lot of his references but so far i think i'm getting what he's putting down.

i took some dex (i don't take much I SWEAR cuz i hate drug culture it's so bad and stupid, drugs haven't been cool in ages, i'm straight edge if anything) and read through.

i laughed at the one where he basically calls nietzsche a virgin autist for coming up with the superman concept.

and he writes so much about infertility that it sounds like he couldn't have any kids. which i mean is relatable.

How so?

ih nothing i

jus

just thoght

that there are a lot of people who can't have kids these days.

Ah. Definitely a big problem. Just look at Korea's birth rate.

i found one on irony i liked.

one sec. i'll find it in the book.

nothing more aggravating than a seamless, unremitteng irony which leaves you no time to breathe and still less to think; which instead of being inconspicuous, occasional, is massive, automatic, at the antipodes of its essentially delicate nature.

unremitting***

it was close to the nietzsche one.

he's just like me fr

That's a good one. He's got so many quotable ones in TTWBB. I also love "All Gall Is Divided." I've read probably seven or eight of his books.

One of my favs: "Rather in a gutter than on a pedestal."

And there's: "Any profound impression is voluptuous or funereal —or both at once."

Last one: "The surfeited hate themselves — not secretly but publicly, and long to be swept away, one way or another. They prefer, in any case, that the sweeping be accomplished with their own cooperation. This is the most curious, the most original aspect of a revolutionary situation."

I think he might've predicted 2020s progressivism 😂 💀

So many gems.

"fanatacisim is the death of conversation. we do not gossip with a candidate for martyrdom."

clearly, he's never been to one of my cookouts.

Hahahaha

You guys would either get along a little too well or absolutely hate each other. ❤️

Cioran's work is paradoxically soothing. Like drinking antifreeze for the bright colour. You know it's going to hurt you, but there's an unmistakable neon allure to it. I first found it a few years back when I was searching for material about suffering that wasn't some equivalent of "Have you tried practicing mindfulness?" Some guys online recommended it, so I bought a copy of "The Trouble" and read it down on Spanish Banks in one sitting. I thought Cioran would have appreciated the silliness of my turning his book on why you should hate that you were born into a beach read. More to the point, I think Cioran's the only person out there who'd thank you for pissing on his grave. If only he were buried in Fort Langley.

lmao

I know I told you when I loaned you the book that he represents the kind of nihilism we would hope to make our way past in the 21st century, and I do believe that. But I also think we had to get to that point of abject nihilism in order to see how bad things could get. He represents our very worst civilizational inclinations in the west, the darkest thoughts we may have about ourselves, having "bested" nature and run out of immediate existential challenges. To him, the void isn't something you come up against — it is you. You're the depression and hopelessness in the universe. And if you buy into it, you give up every conceivable conviction you might have. You don't even kill yourself, though — you live with yourself for as long as possible because suicide, to him, always comes too late, so you better just lie on the sofa and wait. Or sit in the gamer chair and wait. Sorry, Dax.

To take him fully serious is a grave (pun intended?) mistake, and to follow his philosophy to its conclusion is the height of silliness, but if you treat him as the highest benchmark of dissociation and withdrawal and begin to see him more as the darkest deadpan philosopher around, you come out the other side of it with a far greater appreciation for life and your convictions than you started out with.

the way you explain philosophy is so much better than how dax explains it. it makes it seem way more romantic and useful.

I'm hardly an expert.

How is Dax? Did you end up speaking to him about fixing up his life?

sort of, he's not the easiest to encourage.

speaking of him and comedians, did you have any plans tonight?

dax has a shift at richard foliango's house of whores tonught. if you're not buusy, you wanna go?

Do the whores tell jokes?

they try to. it's pretty good. i like to heckle the bad comics but some of them end up being decent. i don't know who the headliner is tonight tho.

you can meet dax finally

All right — I'm down. Meet you there.`

remind me to tell you of my love of the movie the joker later. i swear it's relevant.

28

Funny People

Seeing Avery and Dax together for the first time at the front entrance of the House of Humorous Whores was like a real-life virgin vs. chad dichotomy meme. Avery (who was looking ravishing, making me feral, in his double-breasted blazer and blue-and-white "hot sailor" outfit) went to shake Dax's hand, and because Dax probably hadn't had to formally greet anyone in years, Dax did what guys do when they can't predict the right handshake style being presented to them and went for the fist-bump against Avery's fingers.[79]

There was an "I've heard a lot about you" from Avery (as he collected himself after having his fingers jammed) and an "Eiiguh...Same" from Dax. And a "She mentioned you're into games—that you've been playing through *Life Is Strange* together? I started with the N64 and had a ton of consoles growing up. *Metal Gear Solid* was easily my core franchise as a kid." And an "N64 was mid." And a polite discussion of Dax's @LordBingus gaming channel, and an agreement to have Avery "toss a follow and help out." And a ""Yo...bet" as thanks.

It was necessary to explain to Avery as we were being seated that Dax was *like that*, and that the fact that he had responded with *anything* beyond sporadic grunting noises was an indication Dax liked Avery.[80]

"Some people take time to get comfortable with others," Avery said. "I understand."

I recommended the Bernie Mac n' Cheese, with the new, better thick-cut applewood-smoked pieces of Bernie Mac (bacon)—and when it arrives, jolting me back from the Great Anxiety Firmament, Avery says, "I didn't expect I'd be getting to *eat* the comedians tonight. What a treat."

I tell him that was the fate of every comedian, "to be ground up into meat and turned into Meow Mix for their audiences." (We're sitting at a large floor table with six other guests, who can hear what we're saying. A middle-aged

[79] The worst is when someone goes for the dab and the other person grabs their hand. Shameful.)

[80] This was true—I've tried introducing Dax to male coworkers and acquaintances, and he almost always reverts into a catatonic learning disability mode. This was practically monumental.

white woman who's here with her husband of course told me I had nice hair [when we first sat down.)

Avery's peering around the auditorium, up at the mezzanine, absorbing the space's muted hints of multi-coloured opulence. Oh, if only we'd come here, arm in arm, when this was a true theatre! A live orchestra! Only ankles showing! Yes, yes! (I wanna jump his bones so bad, dawg, and I *will* find a way)

The MC of the show, a local Australian expat comedian by the name of Tim Barbie (okay-funny; does too many jokes about his colicky son and being the first in line at the liquor store every morning) lets us know tonight's show is a three-parter, with a local act, himself, starting things off, then an ephemeral mid-week jobber comedian filling the second slot, and the *veeeery special guest* of Ari G. occupying the top billing, *AWWll the wAHy from one of the cawmeDAY meccAHs, Los AngeleEEs*.

Would Cioran have attended a comedy show if given the chance? I could see him laughing at nothing but the jokes everyone else found unfunny. Or he'd be one of those guests who stays stone-faced the whole time, throws the comedian off, and then goes up to meet the comedian after the show and congratulates them on a terrific set. He might find the worst comedians, the talentless and failing ones, the funniest. The real question: Would he drink at the show?

I glance over the menu. "Did Cioran drink? He seems like he'd be a full-blown alcoholic."

"I remember him writing something about the felicity of having alcoholic parents. Not his—in general."

"He would have loved Janice, then. If he thought that of alcoholic parents, he would've swooned over crack-whore moms."

He leans in and whispers, "this might not be the place to blurt that out." (Am I making Avery uncomfortable already?)

"My alcohol tolerance is terrible, but I think I'll get...What should I get? Are you going to have something?" I ask.

"How about I order a drink for you, and you order one for me?"

"Ohh. I like that. Great idea. I'll flag down Simona" (who's very much showing)

"It's cool that you know everyone by name here."

I settle on an appletini with a sour key candy on the side for Avery, claiming they'll pair well with the pieces of Bernie Mac in his food. Avery orders me a custom negroni with a dash of Sprite.

The first set is Tim Barbie's canned material. I've seen it so many times that I end up delivering the jokes with him in spots, which gets a rise out of Avery and prompts him to tell me more people at our table are noticing us.

The best joke of the set is when Timmy B. talks about growing up as a bogan in Adelaide and being a Limp Bizkit teenager.[81] He sets up the bit by explaining that he had a crush on a cute girl that he grew up with and reconnected with in high school. He had somehow gotten her to agree to go on a date with him, but because it had been so long since they had spoken last, all he could think to break the ice with her was to talk about his love of Limp Bizkit.[82] (He has since stopped bringing up Limp Bizkit around women, and is happily married to an Aboriginal woman from Langley.)

The worst bit of his set is the part about the differences between North American and Australian drinking culture. (So bland and overdone it's not worth repeating.) The crowd likes his set and cheers heartily when he's through.

Three sips into the negroni and I'm drunk, which makes the second set far more tolerable.

It's a double-whammy: an Aubrey Plaza deadpan clone (Regina Montana) reciting stolen jokes from Sarah Silverman and co. (She does a near one-to-one of Silverman's joke about accusing her husband of rape just for funsies.) The women in the crowd are loving this hot trash. The wanton thoughtlessness of the routine—and the liquor—drives me into Avery's ear every other 20 seconds:

"And she stole that line from Ali Wong," I say, losing control of my tongue a little. "The one about men ferring having their dicks stolen by powerful women in a hostile takeover."

[81] Truly, Fred Durst is an international icon and unites us all.

[82] "So wee'h in me dad's cah, an' the geenious that Oiye wahs, Oiye asked heuh: 'Dew yew wanna know how they got theiya name?' An' Oiye think she was jahs beeein' sweet, 'cause she nAWdded, an' Oiye conteenued—Oiye really thought at the tiyme, Oiye really did theenk this would make heuh loike me—Oiye went on: 'Theyah's thees theeng Americans dew, aPParently, wheyah they awwl sit around in a cahcle and put a beescuit in the middle—then, they awwl wheep out theyuh dongas an' wank, an' if they heet the beescuit with their spoof, they 'ave to eat it, the leemp beescuit.' An' let me tell yew, Oiye've neva seen a woman, not even when Oiye threw up in a local Deeyenny's pahking lot afta eating ten chocolate chip flappahs during a beendah, look so disGUSted in moi loife."

"Did she? That unimaginative bitch," he sneers.

//

"Oh nooo. She's aboutta rip off this whole gag abou the nurse wanning ta steal her underwear from her. Nicole Byer did a ssspecial on this. Watch, she'll do a—yep, there it is. Excitement about leaving house. $700 ambulance ride. Oh, but she's changed the innured body part to a wrist, so I guess it'sss okay. *Fuck* you, lady."

//

"Now she's doing the 'giddy guy' sex routine from Illililza Schlesssinger! SHE'S DOING THE 'GIDDY GUY'—Whoops. Sorrrs. But I can't believe it! How can you do it so obviously like this and not get banned from shows?"

"Report her ass, Savoy. Get the comedy mods on her."

//

"That's it! That's *it*! Fuck it—I should get up there and do a set. Iould do it better than these bozos."

"You should."

"I been thinking about doing comedy forever, as the ultimate backup in case things in my life wen wrong. I think I've finally decided. I'm gunna wride a great female comedian set—sssomething that isn't about pussies and queefing and hating guys—well, at least not the good ones like you. I can' take it anymore. I've had a few ideas over the years—ever since I saw Joaquin Phoenix in *Joker*—I think I was telling you—I've picccured getting up on that stage and showing people that it...uhh—*what* it—it means to really be funny. God, I've seen that movie so many times. I'll tell you more about it later. You've probably seen it, but I *have* to tell you about whatditwas like watchin' it back inna day."

"I'll be front row for your first show."

//

Mercifully, Regina ceases, and the plagiarism routine doesn't embitter the crowd. (They likely haven't watched the ripped-off sets.)

I order another negroni; Avery switches to water. "I'm good for now," he says. "Gotta build up to drinking again. And I'm driving, so I shouldn't go too wild."

"What, you're fourteen 14 beers in and your drive home's two hours? GET THIS MAN HIS KEYS!"

Instead of Preggo, Dax comes by to drop off my drink.

"Hey, Dax," I beckon (it's between sets now, so we can talk louder), "I wanna do some stand-up. Show these bums how isss done. How do I get started?"

"Eiiiugugh...There's uhh...you'd probably have to do one of our...uhh... amateur nights, every second Monday night. You've seen emmm, vro. You gotta, like, talk to Elijiyeh. He handles booking."

"'Kay, I'm gonna do it. And tell Simona to ring in another appletini. Put it on my tab, barkeep!" Avery does an eyebrow thing at me. "Nya ha ha!"

(Where have the other People at our table gone? Probs in the washroom.)

Ari G., the main attraction, takes the stage next, to a sizeable crowd pop. (They know him?) *I'll* be the judge of whether he's a comedy kingpin or not!

Ari commences by informing us of all the shows he has written for: *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, The Emmys (guess they need people to write the generic category introductions and the long, jarring, misplaced political monologues for award shows), and adult cartoons, such as the hit new Adult Swim comedy, *Child Euthanasia*. But he loves this more than writing for the big shows, he says. This is where comedy was born, who it was made for.[83] We all need a little comedy in times like these, don't we? Show of hands—how many of us are worried about the state of the world right now? Rising gas prices, Russian militarism, Netflix no longer letting you share accounts? He sees a lot of hands. (*Great watch—is that a Rolex?* We should be proud of our baller status, New West.) But whether or not we have Rolexes, we *should* be worried. There's more than ever to be afraid of, when you think about it! And not just that Netflix can arbitrarily cut down your binge-watching of the latest season of *Female Warrior!* (More crowd work—jobs, "where ya froms," etc.)

He claims that comedy is under attack (Nuaarr!!!) That down in his spellbinding, guilt-laden land of the United States of America (we've probably heard of it! From the Vietnam War fiasco! Which we lost! What a great superpower that is! The US sucks—loses all its wars!—hates being a citizen!—smelly, bad place!—jk, he chuckles!) Republican politicians[84] have proposed a bill to "actually turn art forms like comedy, what we're enjoying right now, into potential illegalities!" (Extra nuaaar!!!!!) The "No Comedy, No Fun" Bill (*not* its real name, btw, guys—he did a funny on

[83] Go for the cheap pops, king—they always work.

[84] He gives us permission to boo.

us!), if passed, would censor all forms of art to remove "morally damaging" material, including stand-up. Isn't that sad? Isn't that a crime against a fundamental *freedom* of the spirit? Of the Constitution, which is a living, breathing document? He thought it was sad! But on the other side of things, it was harder than ever before to be a funny man or woman or other-gendered because of POLITICAL CORRECTNESS! He was doing a show in Boston for a crowd of university kids, and they had booed him for a joke about Palestinian people! What?! Back in the days of Richard Pryor, his most favouritest comedian, you had to learn to take a joke. That was simply the way it was. And people weren't as soft when he was coming up either. Now, there are new terms for everything! Most of them are good and create more equity and understanding in the world, so we should definitely have them—but only most of them! (!!! :O) He was at a dinner party at a Hollywood producer friend's a few weeks ago in L.A., and the subject of the rapidly increasing homeless population had come up, and he had been speaking to this lady about it and had used the term "homeless." Her eyes had turned into saucers (we know, like the ones private caterers serve salmon *pah-tay* on—that exact size!) right then and there. "Don't you mean 'differently housed'?" she had grilled him. He hadn't known what to say in return! Didn't that term cause *more* confusion and humiliation? "Homeless" is right to the point—makes you a straight-shooter. *This guy ain't got no fuckin' house. Not even a coat rack to hang his hat on.* (No one wears the kinds of hats you have to hang up anymore, but we probably understood what he was going for. Ha ha!) "Differently housed" might mean he's switching from a Craftsman bungalow to a Vancouver Special. (Ah, see! We could appreciate how much he knew about our city!) It could mean he was downsizing. Shacking up with one of the other heroin addicts! It could mean so many things! George Orwell, who is often misinterpreted, famously wrote in *Politics and the English Language* that "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity." Is this not that? So he told her that she was being insincere—and then everything got quiet. If we've ever committed a faux pas—like, a really big faux pas before, we know—it gets *quiet*. You can hear your heart beat a mile a minute. You're starting to sweat. You're going a little cross-eyed. *Someone say something, anything!* And then his producer friend brought in the smoked salmon carpaccio to smooth things over. But things were tense for a sec there! What he wanted to say to her was that, with pressure from both sides, and his having to keep track of two political enemies at the same time, he felt like he was in Nazi Germany! (😱) This is exactly what the Nazis did! (✋❌) And then we all know how that went! But he didn't bring this up when he had the opportunity to meet President Biden and VP Kamala Harris a little while back because he was on his best behaviour. He was there with four other comedy writers, writing a

piece about the need for gun control, which he is a firm advocate for—*guns and people both kill people—that's literally their fucking design, people!*—for the Presidential Ball/Gala/Powwow, and got to hear the administration's takes about the rise of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic rhetoric in these dangerous times where we should really be focused on bombing Lebanon...

(Biden...The ice cream cone drawing...Why didn't they invite me to the White House to show it?)

I drink the second negroni a touch too fast after daring Avery to chug his, while Ari goes on about the NRA's connection to anti-Zionism and the dangerous pro-Palestinian sit-in protests at Google. (He knows the CFO.) I mumble to Avery about needing the washroom or to go outside or something similarly non-lucid. I'm too lost in the sauce to call this guy a genocidal Zionist chump as we're getting up. Avery looks perfect as he drapes my arm over his upper back. If he were an EMT, I'd injure or intoxicate myself daily for this treatment.

How is Preggo already so pregnant?

Can I get pregnant soon? I wanna get pregnant.

What's in a negroni?[85]

We movin'. Aww lord—we movin'.[86]

"Preggo so gregnant...gregort...Ha! Ah! Li the meme—y'know the mem..."

"Sorry!" he calls out. Can't see to whom.

The textures under my feet change. My eyes are barely open.

"Do you feel like you're going to throw up?"

"Fffuuc...kem. Wee...ball..."

"Why don't we sit here a sec? We sit on the ground in the empty front foyer, a stone's throw away from the washrooms. Outside, the cars are meandering up and down Columbia Street in the night's light rain. Avery smells like dairy and curly fries, Bernie Mac...

I haven't been calm like this in...?

---

[85] If I drink it, is it a *negroidi?* Ha ha.

[86] It's downright sublime being in the arms of your beloved while drunk 🥰.

He adjusts me against his shoulder. "I've got an energy bar in my pocket. Maybe that'll help sober you up. It's a fancy one—Hornby."

"Mm."

"I'm glad you bailed us out of that—you always seem to be the one bailing us out of these jams. That guy was practically ready to start preaching. What an establishment hack."

I lose some of the bar when I go to eat it. It tastes like honey. Eating while you're drunk turns you into some sort of mole. You eat with your eyes closed, grope around, and miss half the food. You'd be better off underground. But when you do get it into your mouth, it's heavenly. *Honey-ly*, in this case. *Bazinga.*

"You had a purse in there, right? Wouldn't want someone to snag it. Think you'll be okay on your own for a sec?"

"Mhm."

"And then we can get you into the washroom if you need to wash your face or do anything else."

"mMmm...Don' go..."

When the sauce has overtaken you and you find yourself locked in the tunnels of drunkenness, time bends and distorts—temporality as you know it warps and ebbs like a bad headache. Avery may never return. His absence may stretch for a light year—no, wait—that's length, not time. Uh...

My nebulous musings are cut short when I feel a hand being laced into mine.

As if by teleportation or BMW wormhole, we arrive at the apartment. He helps me down the steep steps to the basement entrance.

My eyes are half-open. Dax isn't home. Still working. Avery could rape me right now. Wouldn't that be the cherry on top?

Ha. Hah. Ha...

It wouldn't *be* rape. I would like it.

"You live on a street named after an apple? Fits with the botany vibe. Where are your kitchen rags? Never mind—found one."

(Fridge—open—ing—*crack*—foot-steps—chloro—form—ahh?)

"Are you okay? Do you think you're going to vomit?"

"MMdo...Do it..."

"Do what?"

"Do't...Rape...Rag...Do't"

"Savoy, you're not making any sense."[87]

29

Lazaru$$y

I emerge from the ether goopy, viscous. On the Craigslist couch. With a blanket over me. The clock on the stove reads 1:06 AM.

Panic. Avery's gone. Forever.

I told him I thought he was going to rape me. The foulest, most untrusting comment you can levy at a man.

I start tapping the back of my head against the wall as self-punishment.[88]

Shoes? Mmm? Sideways?

Those are Avery's.

He's lying on his side by the refrigerator, a pillow from the Craigslist couch under his head. He's snoring slightly. He looks like he's in pain. Most people, when they sleep, have a neutral expression, as if they've been powered down, returned to a paleolithic factory default. The lucky ones look happy. He looks...like he's in an argument. Like he's crying the rarest tears—ones of anger.

His apnea! No machine! I shake him.

He's dazed. "You okay?" he asks. "You passed out."

"I've got a bit of a headache, but I should be fine."

---

[87] .....

[88] A technique from childhood when, from my room, I'd overhear Janice tweaking on the junk.

"I was worried you might've mixed the alcohol with something. I stayed up and watched you for a bit."

"I took some Dexedrine yesterday, and it was the long-acting one, but that should've—it should've worn off."

It's freezing in here,[89] but like the affable host I ought to be for the man I love, I offer him food, water—everything. It's too late for him to drive home now, and he says he can get by without his machine.

Over in my *damn-girl-you-live-like-this?* room, I show Avery the slugs. He presses a finger against the glass where Sisyphus 1 is glommed on. "Curious little guys, aren't they?" he says. "I see you've outfitted them with boulders to push. Was that an act of benevolence or malice?"

"'The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to...'" Shit! (Can't remember the rest of the quote. And I even read the *SparkNotes* summary of *The Myth* in case this very opportunity ever presented itself.)

"'...*to fill a man's heart*.' Would it not be better to release them, though? You could keep them in the backyard—convert them into free-range slugs?"

"I've thought about it, but even though I know their faces and body patterns well, it would be hard to keep track of them. I can't chip them like you would if you were studying an animal. And my landlord, knowing him, would put salt out if he saw three *thicc* slugs on his back deck. *And* I don't know if slugs lose their ability to do their equivalent of hunting after being domesticated. They might end up confused and hungry."

"They wouldn't exactly be out there felling mastodons, but I see your point."

"And, honestly, they're some of the only company I have in this world. I like having them around. I talk to them, and it really looks like they're listening at times. They listen more than Dax—that's for sure. It's silly to get attached to slugs, but I love them. I *genuinely* do."

"I can tell. Sorry for suggesting you release them."

Sisyphus 3 has somehow managed to push a boulder onto Sisyphus 2's head.

"I'm gonna stay up a bit longer and work on an illustration order," I say, double-checking that the closet door housing my improvised Avery shrine is closed and sealed with Joe Rogan's weight. "I texted Dax to be quiet tonight,

[89] I've started turning off the heat when leaving the house to save money for the eventual European exodus.

so I you should be able to get some rest. I'll be on the couch if you need anything."

To my shock and complete thrill, he also wants to stay up and get some work done.

(>:3c)

"You can use some paper from one of my old notebooks on the desk. Under the Homonculus sculpture." (New addition.)

For at least an hour, we sit in relative silence, backs against the wall, the only noise the tapping of my digital stylus against the iPad screen and the frantic scribbling of his pen. (I sneak in a few illustrations of Avery for old times' sake while working on a thought-provoking commission of Andrew Tate and Tristan Tate, *in their "War Room,"* with big smiles and...*full nappies*...) Normally, I'd put on music—my "p o m e g r a n a t e ( ) d a y d r e a m s <3" playlist of my deepest, darkest cringe, or the newly conceived, Swans-dominated "Cioran-type Beat 🛌🛋️☔👨" —but the lack of noise is splendidly abyssal.

His sketching skills, while rudimentary in spots, are direct and accurate. He conjures up a figure in recline, slightly twisted, holding a microphone. Their body is split vertically, with half displaying extreme definition and the other undefined and falling away to fragments and atoms, in a—and I hate to make this reference—*Thanos* way. But not soi-ish. Mature. The face wears an expression similarly split in half, the right side featuring the discomfort of affliction, exaggerated agony, and the left side, facing away from the would-be audience, featuring an expression I can't place. It's somewhere in between hatred and amusement? A stank-eye and a wink? I've never seen this expression before.

"This one'll take some doing," he says. "Might be easier as a torso versus a whole-body piece. I'll figure all that out soon enough. I may inlay metallic accentuation in the eyes, if it fits thematically. And for the mic..."

Big mind = sexy. I must. Must! Now! The! Time! Before! Ruin!

Low LED purple lighting: activated. I've waited long enough. Big Brainvery will be mine.

"Avery?"

"Yes?"

"Do-Do you want to have sex...w-with me?"[90]

"Are you still drunk?"

"No." (A little?)

"I..."

(Haven't had sex in three years. Probably longer. Please?)

"It's—men—they—you—might expect that? So I wanted to...offer."

He's doing a double-eyebrow move. "Savoy, you're sensationally pretty, and you're full of energy all the time in a way that's almost unfathomable. But you're pushing yourself. An hour ago, you were comatose. If you want my answer: Yes. I would like to have sex with you—I've been erect practically this whole night. I thought you might've noticed me stuffing it down while you were leaning on my shoulder earlier. Not to be gross."

(Be gross. Be so gross, papi. Get ***FREAKY***.)

"You can be gross! You have my permission!"

"I've had pre-cum dripping down my leg for the last, like, 30 minutes."

(Ho yeah—that's the *stuff*. Now, we're cookin'.)

"But," he continues, "I don't want to feel like I'm taking advantage of you—no matter how unbelievably hot you might be."

"So you..."

"With every part of me, I want to. But we should save it for the next time I see you."

I throw myself on top of him, straddling him and his "manhood."

"It's okay, Avery. It's okay. Kiss me."

We kiss.

"Sav—"

"It's all right. It's all right."

[90] I'm ravenous. Having this beast of a man beside me for so long has revitalized the part of me that has been dead for years.

We kiss more, more, more, more, more! 🌋🌋🌋

"Hey—I appreciate your enthus—" *(*smooch*)* "—iasm, but you're clear—" *(*smooch*)* "—ly shaking."

"Mm..."

"—Started as soon as I *(*big smooch*)* placed my hand on your breast."

"Nuh mm!"

"No need—mph—"

(I'm gonna...)

"Mm..."

"Let's—mmph—wait, okay? I'll have sex with you—mph—any other time. Quit—mph—interrupting me with kisses—you're not playing fair."

(I'm goooonna...🤢🤢🤢)

"Savoy?" he asks.

"Mhm..."

The vomit comes swiftly, splashing onto the covers and narrowly missing his head.

30

Janice Matviyenko (AKA Mother...)

January 14, 8:09 PM

Went in becuase
IT HURETS
HIP IT DOCTOR SAID
IM DIAGNOSID WITH
FUCKUNG TD
it starts wit a Aff something
Its from my fucking meds decase bc
of been on them
4 years i dont take
them anymore
every night its edibles
or butter.
NEED SURGERY
SAYS DOC
Ereally bad but I jcno bc all
i feel is PAIN

AND
Your
GRANNY IS
A FUCKING LIAR
saying i,m on drugs again
I cry after i see Speople bc
 have no choice /I haven't
touched fdrugs in AMONTH

i'm sorry about your hip, i'm glad you're clean.

DNNot let your nana know i'm
drinking!

February 17, 10:49 AM

I hope u get this n time
i have a outcall to pinsku know him
i dint want ur dad nowing .
Ffs id like for once some money in my pocket
i;ve paid out so much with him
260 for bike repair, insurance, 700 for his rent
2
months in a row 80 week his groceries
1300
hotels rooms
i'm getting 270 smh i can get my dies my ointments
creams
tanning lotion tct
i can bank til monday holiday after he goes to work
after utha bat stil leaves me 150 .

i'm sorry to ask but bc i have no one else could
you send $300 etransfer?
just so we can stay af lote until then or less

????????? ?

??????

k IGNORE ME
DAUHTER

like a ll the rest.....

Today, 1:39 PM

SAVI
your PawPaw died this mrning.
you r nana found him in his fav chair an
thougt he was watching PR is Right he wasnr
breathing she called a ambulence but they
said there wasnr anything they could
do was gone jus he
like that only 76 yrs

They took hi to the morge and thats where
he is right now have to prepare the
his body for the funeril service soon probably the next
feq says were gonna wait for you we were gonna wait
so you coud ome back and say your byes
nanas gonna send you $$ fr tickets pls buy
1 and come quick
SAVI
quick
his body will ROT in there if you
dont come qiuck CALL NANA
let her now you bought the tcketits will hold
them off from cREAMATING him. 🙏

SAVI

31

Work.

Yet another splendid feature of today's employers: They never let you take any fucking time off. Got the flu? Just don't cough in the drinks. Period cramps? Take an Advil. Your nearly severed head's about to detach from your blood-spewing body? You can do overtime, right? Need to fly to Edmonton to attend your grandfather's funeral and re-enter the hell from which you escaped several years ago? *Aahumm...Eye dohno, Zavoy!*

Why is this even an issue? We have no customers. Raphael's "ads" (he's been at them for *weeeeeks*) haven't been working. You could replace me with a poorly trained gibbon right now and get the same customer service.

An hour ago, before Raphael showed up in his positively heinous 80%-off Emporio Armani outlet drip, smelling like whatever you'd get if you boiled turnips in Drakkar Noir, I spent 30 minutes on my phone in the prep/storage area spamming people, Avery included, who somehow hasn't disowned me for spewing on him, with reels of recreations of Chinese construction accidents, rotcore daily aphorisms, and animal rescue clips. When I felt my brain smoothing over, I opened as many plastic bags of cutlery and plates and

random shit as I could and set up a drum kit on the countertop so I could try to play along to "Break Stuff" by Limp Bizkit in honour of Tim Barbie.[91]

Then, I dissociated a while and thought about quitting and applying at Panacea. Could I show up there now, after what I did? Think about how hard ABG would scoff if she knew...

"I doono," Raphael muses as I press him again. "We ah short ztaff-a fight-a now."

"Respectfully, Robiño, I think we can spare the man-power."

(He's only half-registering.)

"You could dock my pay.[92] What if I were to get someone to cover for me. How about Greyston?"

(Nothing.)

"Maria?"

"You get Maria to cover?"

(Two of my shifts overlap with hers. Does this guy even check the schedules he makes? *Vaffanculo* 🤌 [Looked up Italian swear words to call him while in the back.])

"Hey, Maria," I holler. "Could you cover my two shifts next week?"

"Well, yeah, but aren't we working the same—"

"Just say yes."

"Yes."

"Thanks. I'll pay you $40. That work?"

"Yep."

"Beautiful. Thanks so much."

(Turning to him.) "There you go. I'm gonna take my 15 now." I excuse myself to go use the washroom so I can text Avery and apologize for the 40th time

[91] The drumming drowned out the noises I'd conjured up in my head of Raphael fucking her back there. Because apparently everyone can fuck but me.

[92] Can it get any lower? Would that make me a full-on neo-feudal serf convert?

for vomiting on him, even though he has already forgiven me, but I see Mr. Clemence walking toward the entrance. Might as well catch my biggest fan before he enters. I need some of his patented advice.

Outside, amid the honking and city-din, I ask Mr. C if he's got a minute. Let him know I went to Fort Langley and felt Whitman's influence, and that things have been progressing nicely since; notify him that I won't be here next week.

"I'm sorry, Savoy. You must be crushed. Family is precious."

"About that...Can I ask you a question? Am I a bad granddaughter if I don't want to go back?"

"I reckon it would depend on the circumstances."

I lapse into how I lived with Grammy and Pawpaw for a little while after they rescued me from foster care, and off and on through the elementary days: "They didn't want me, initially, because of—*this.*" (I'm pointing to the colour of my skin.) "Which I understand. But their son, Janice's brother, Uncle Reggie, had just killed himself and left behind *his* son, and I think they needed to have family around. His son Wally's autistic—like, the kind where it shows—fixations, speech patterns. If we both have it, his is worse than mine —I fixate and pattern-focus in subtle ways and over-explain things, so—oh, gosh. What am I doing. It's a nice sunny day. Sorry!"

"Dear me. That's a lot for a young girl to endure."

"Eh. That's not even close to the worst of it. That was the most normal part of my childhood. Pawpaw didn't say too much. I'm not sure I'd ever spoken to him about serious things more than a handful of times. I would've liked to speak to him as an adult about real things, you know? I'd talk to him and Nana on the phone sometimes, but I haven't seen any of them since moving here. Have I been a bad granddaughter? Was I supposed to reach out? I'm a bad granddaughter! I knew it. Ohhhh..."

"Can I be completely honest, Savoy?"

"Of course."

"I don't know how to help you here."

32

Positive moid experiences Anonymous 2 hours 282817 >>282821 >>282824 >>282827 >>282833 >>282835 >>282838 >>282850 >>282861

i know we like to talk about how much moids disgust us a lot, but lately i've actually had really good experiences with them.

it's made me think about all those times i was mean to ones that migt not've deserved it. my favourite customer at work is an older moid, and after talking to him about family stuff the other day, he said he might invite me over to his house for tea because he sees i'm like his late stepdaughter. and the boy i've been courting/dating, the one i've been posting about on here ("a") has been very understanding. we just went to a comedy show, and i was going to have sex with him after not touching a moid for over 3 years, but he turned me down and i threw up on him (v v v embarrassing). the funny thing is that he's still talking to me and helped me clean it up when it happened. i think i love him. i know i love him. moids aren't that bad sometimes, can't believe i'm saying that. maybe we're too hard on them sometimes? can love actually heal?

Anonymous 2 hours 282821

>>282817 (You)
This googly-eyed bitch forsook the pinkpill and took the cockpill instead. mandatory sterilization.

Anonymous 2 hours 282824

>>282817 (You)

Anonymous 4 hours 282827

>>282817 (You)
OP, the old man wants to lull you into a false sense of security with this fake paternal routine. Let me guess, you don't have a good relationship with your father. Do not, under any circumstances, go to his home. He wants something from you. And fi you let him, he'll get it.

Anonymous 4 hours 282828 >>282844 >>282855 >>282891

Positive moid experiences? No such thing. One of my coworkers, let's call him Cleetus, has a cubicle near mine. It would be no exaggeration to say it's filled with garbage: torn magazines, candy bar wrappers, stationary packaging. Major hoarder/pigsty vibes, but at least hoarders know they have a problem. Sometimes I see the cleaning lady go in there and remove some garbage if it starts poking out of the cubicle, but I think she knows it's too big a job and has started to ignore it. And Cleetus sucks at his job. Constantly makes mistakes, always asks for help. I've had to clean up his messes more times then I can count.

The company was having a celebration for its 25th year in business, so they decided to give out prizes and bonuses to the employees who'd contributed to its success. I was expecting something - maybe a gift basket with some stupid crackers and cheese or an iPod Nano from 15 years ago. But no, they have to go and give everyone else Bluetooth speakers, concert tickets, $250 Best Buy gift cards, and not a single thing for me. I was upset, as I should have been. The cherry on top was that our moid management gave Cleetus a PS5 and the new Spider Man game. I wanted to take the PS5 and bash hois skull in with it.

Anonymous 3 hours 282833

>>282817 (You)
pure pottery
i had a twitter screencap for this but i can't find it

Anonymous 3 hours 282835 >>282842

>>282817 (You)
r u the nona who posted a few weeks ago in the existential feels thread about that date you went on with thatcemetery date u went on with that scrote??? are you back to brag again because some XY wants to use you as a cock holster??? stop bragging, it's sick. get help

Anonymous 3 hours 282838 >>282841

>>282817 (You)
all moids deserve to be vomited upon

Anonymous 3 hours 282841

>>282838

Anonymous 3 hours 282842

>>282835
lmao I remember that. she said she talked to him about poetry. moids can't feel –how are they supposed to write? I've never read a convincing, realistic book that wasn't written by a woman.

(pic rel)

33

What If We Kissed by the Radioactive Asbestos Room? / Of Verandas and Gulags: Cummed on in the Cwazy House

The grounds of the Riverview Mental Hospital complex (recently renamed to the easy-to-pronounce səmiqʷəʔelə) are exactly that—*complex*.

Whoever designed the layout in 1913 must've been banging opium, 'cause it's tiered on the side of a mountain like the most confusing Chinese rice field plantation you've ever seen, and with more obstacles. From an aerial view, the network of roads and asphalt must parallel a promiscuous octopus, latching onto a rag-tag arrangement of buildings (horny 2D Japanese women 🐙👘).

The north end, the functional end, is comprised of an ambulance bay,[93] a few older buildings that remain in use, even after the hospital was formally closed in July of 2012, and a freshly constructed addiction management and mental health clinic by the name of "Red Fish Healing Centre."[94]

From there, you can stay along the lower grounds, which run along Lougheed Highway as it meets with Highway 1, and eventually reach the abandoned Crease Clinic, which was once for war veterans. It's got European-style mirrored double-staircases at the main entrance that white girls who complain

[93] EMT clubhouse? Where they play foosball and eat cobb/taco salads while they wait to be called to rescue drunkards from children's playground fixtures or scoop the pulpy remnants of crashed motorists off the pavement?

[94] For Red Fish, they've done the same thing as was done with the newer buildings at SFUBC—opted for that peculiar West Coast technique of fusing wood accents, glass, and concrete in a way that's supposed to be """state of the art."""" Doesn't this aesthetic make mental health problems worse??? I'd wager the West Coast architectural school has claimed thousands of lives.

about colonialism fly all the way to Europe to see in person and take pictures of themselves in front of. And its terra cotta exterior and arched doorways and windowpanes give it an emporeal (*emperorial*? I'll ask Avery when I see him) stateliness that *would* heal your mental illness. You'd feel beholden to the building to get better if you had to recover in it, I figure.

Head up the mountain from this point and you'll spy Tudor-style cottages that were once used as a part of a school to house troubled youths they had on some Shia LaBeouf *Holes* shit.[95]

Keep hiking up the mountain in your lifted thigh-high leather boots, pleated skirt, and wool sweater, and you'll come upon a few other random facilities—those of note being North Lawn, where they used to treat tuberculosis patients (RIP), East Lawn, Centre Lawn, and West Lawn.

East Lawn was the "Female Chronic Wing" back in the day (*same*), Centre Lawn was the "Acute Psychopathic Wing,"[96] and West Lawn was the "Male Chronic Wing."[97] Centre Lawn's got a spectacular portico entrance, with giant columns on either side and a small veranda you could pretend to be a Disney princess on, in a non-Disney adult way. But West Lawn is the best of the bunch, because it possesses the stateliness of a British mansion, somewhere you could live. It's also got a magnificent entrance lined with columns, a balustrade, a veranda.[98]

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[95] They thought putting these boys to work would help fix their attitude problems—and they were right. If you put guys like Dax into hard labour for a few years, you'd get nothing but chads in the end, like in those black-and-white videos of the gulags on YouTube. Those guys had the most insane jawlines, and they absolutely mogg today's men in terms of strength and resolve. Fuck David Goggins and these IG lifestyle influencers, with their metaphorical boats and their activated almonds and their 4:00 AM wake times—if people, especially on *le* alt-right, really want to fix society and their own shit, they'll start buying pickaxes and start stonemaxxing immediately. You could even fix SFUBC and other universities in a similar way. 95% of the performative pozzed culture on campuses would go away if you instated a rule that let you challenge other students you disagreed with to a duel. But no, 'cause of "human rights" or some bullshit. Enjoy your lame academia "culture." Enjoy eating the bugs! (Your body can't process the chitin—it'll cause cancer!)

[96] Also same.

[97] Also-also same.

[98] The veranda is more generous in size than Centre Lawn's—so much so you could hold a *fête champêtre* on it if you wanted to—a Jazz Era one—and gaze out through the smoke of self-rolled cigarettes and gas lamps—and smell the pomade and blush made of tiger balls and lead, and the perfumes and colognes made of endangered (not then) mystical Antarctica flowers that only bloom two days a year—and—and!!!

The front door to the West Lawn building, where I've asked him to meet me so I can deliver the awful news of my leaving but also have sex with him, is barred shut with thick steel. A sign reads:[99]

Danger: Asbestos
Blah Blah
No Entry Permitted
Blah Blah
Because you're a pussy
and we don't want your wittwe
wungs hurting!
Blah Blah
Wah Wah
No Fun Allowed

"It's like something out of *The Last of Us*," I muse to Avery, who's now standing smexxily beside me. "Not the gay show. Or the gay second game. The first game—the non-gay good one."

"I heard they filmed a few shows here. *The X-Files* and a couple others. I can see why. Look at that bush poking out from the top floor. The wind must've blown the seeds up there."

"The hole in the roof must provide enough sun. There's probably moss up there as well. It's possible to grow plants without any soil—we call the process *hydroponic*. You put what you want to grow in a nutrient solution. You can use vermiculite, a mineral compound, perlite, which is a volcanic glass, or coconut husks as the 'soil' and sorta just hang what you're growing—"

"I appreciate the overview, Miss Botany, but I doubt they've got such a complex system in use up there. I've heard this joint's mostly filled with homeless people these days."

"Maybe the *differently housed*[100] people squatting here are into horticulture. I hear that if you come at night, you can hear them running around inside. They probably enter from around back."

"Awesome. Wanna go take a look and see if we can find some?"

Around back, all the accessible windows on the first and second floors are boarded up, and a blue temporary fence has been erected to create a perimeter

[99] It for sure reads like this—I swear 🐓.

[100] How's that for a callback, Ari G.?

around the base of the building. The vagrants must use tunnels. If there's one line you could use to describe modern life, it would be "access denied."[101] We've learned to let chickens roam free again after keeping them in torturous warehouses, yet we still confine ourselves to the smallest spaces, bar one another from exercising their freedoms out of an outmoded itch to sequester the best things for the top few or to exercise control. I DON'T WANT TO BE AN AMERICAN WAREHOUSE CHICKEN! LET ME IN!!!

"You seem taken with this building."

"I am. I'd live here if they'd let me. There's a cemetery behind it, too. You know how much I love those."

"Then let's go in." He isn't kidding. "See that unroofed abutment off to the right where the blue fence ends? The door is open a smidge. The fence doesn't encompass it. We could squeak in and see what's back there. Maybe they haven't barred the windows behind it."

"I don't wanna get you sick. You've already got your nose stuff."

"What's a little asbestos when you've spent a lifetime being poisoned by everyday chemicals?"

Squeezing through the door, we reach a small closed-off nook, like a shed without a roof, filled with wild grass and broken glass. The first-floor windows within it are boarded up. It's gonna require both of us. We do a cheerleading pose: he laces his hands together, and I step on them. He lifts me with ease until I catch the ledge of the window. Doing my best not to fall straight backward off the ledge, I step over the jagged glass remaining at the bottom of the broken window. Fuck. I forgot about getting Avery up here.

"I'll go downstairs and kick through one of the boards so you can get in."

"No need," he replies. "I think I can make it."

He does a *Prince of Persia* maneuver to reach the bottom of the windowsill. As he's shimmying his way up, I grab onto him and pull.

"Yippie! Woooaoowooow!"[102]

Even with the other windows shuttered, the place is well-lit inside from all the holes in the walls. The tile flooring is caked with dust, drywall, and the odd

[101] People would be a lot happier if they were allowed to go places.

[102] Yes, I make this noise.

piece of glass or debris. The drop-ceiling tiles have mostly fallen, revealing the wood and concrete above. The air is thick and grimy enough to be papier-mâché in the mouth. It really is like *The Last of Us* in here. *So fucking cool!* 😻

In the middle of the main staircase is a floor-to-ceiling cage that was once used to house an elevator. Or maybe chuck misbehaving patients into shark-infested waters below. It's got the wrought iron that they never use anymore, the type you wanna nibble on. You get this appetite when you look at it—this thrill. Beautiful heritage buildings make you feel like you could lift yourself up to a level of refinement this century doesn't want you to have. They take this exaltation of the spirit away from us; they don't want us to nibble on wrought iron anymore. It's time to reclaim our rights, brethren!

"Down or up?" Avery asks.

"Down first—then up."

We descend the staircase, and things get darker. I don't want to confess to him that I have weak lungs, but the air is getting heavier by the second.

With this phone light out, he leads me down a hallway, along which we see a gallery of graffiti. (Among others: "Only the good end up here. Fuck society!"; "Stab any pregnant women lately?"; "George Bush STILL doesn't like black people!"[103])

We reach an exit that's blocked from the other side. Avery says the text on the door is in Russian: "Cyrillic? Here? Strange."

"I saw a TikTok recently about how they're scooping up street people in white vans and 'taking them away.' Maybe they're storing them here. Or maybe the spore monsters spawn here!"

"My Russian's poor, but I think it says 'Staff Only' on the door."

"No, this is where they stored the asbestos and let the Freudian doctors and nursing staff bake with it. Wait, you can read Russian?"[104]

"I took it up years ago because I wanted a secret code I could use in public to get away with saying anything I wanted. I realized no one in my life spoke Russian. I didn't wanna be a schizo talking to myself, so I stopped."

"They would've put you in here. But I would've joined you."

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[103] Wish I'd done this one.

[104] Товарищ Avery, звонили из Кремля. Сэм Хайд—призрак Киева!

We ring around the metal structure and make our way to the top floor—picking at fragments of wallpaper along the way, drawing on surfaces, stopping to kiss—to where we think we saw the bush. We follow the light until we reach a corridor, at the end of which is *the* bush.

Someone's left a foldable chair by it, on top of a patch of moss. We can breathe again.

"Take a look at the view," Avery says, wandering toward the shorn-off corner we'd seen from down below.

From the edge of the corridor, you can see all the way down to the highway and into ƛ̓éxətəm Regional Park (Colony Farms). In the distance, people float unreservedly along the Coquitlam River. Joggers line the trails. Closer, a Border Collie fetches tennis balls on the grass.

It's late afternoon, so most of the annoying tourists and Chinese people have left.[105]

"This is much better than wandering around outside," he says. "And we've got our bush pal, too. It's a miracle it hasn't died all the way up here."

Death. That's my in. That's how I'll explain my going away.

"Hey, Avery. I've...gotta go...back home."

"Is it already that late?"

"I mean, I've gotta go *home* home. To Edmonton."

"You're leaving...?"

"Yes. No—I mean, just for a week—"

"You scared me," he says, caressing the bush's leaves.

"*Less* than a week. A couple days. I have to go back to Edmonton because my grandpa died."[106]

"Sorry—that's terrible."

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[105] Why would you come all the way here just to *see* a building? Do something with it! Touch it! Sniff it! Munch it! *Interact* with it! Anything but meekly stand in front of it doing the peace sign!!! No one cares about your new WeChat profile pic/story update!

[106] He wouldn't judge me, but saying "Pawpaw" in front of him—we're probably not there yet.

"It's been a few years. Pawpaw—" (and there it is anyway) "was good to me—at least when I was younger. I owe it to him to show up. But then, I'll be back! You won't even know I was gone!"

"Well, I *will* know you're gone. My life hasn't quite been the same since you started drawing cartoon porn around me." He approaches, kicking up an eddy of dust from the floor. "I've said it before—you're a peculiar case. In a sea of people who only want to 'pet doggos' and watch *The Office;* drink craft beer on weekends and toil away at their middle-management jobs and never look outside themselves, at why they're so miserable, why we're *all* so miserable, or ever do anything meaningful about it, you're *you*. You don't let your trauma destroy you. You're someone who makes an oft-agonizing life seem worth it. You inspire me. You're beautiful, Savoy. So your presence will be missed."

"Gaaahhuheuhgh..."

I practically collapse into the chair.

"I might go so far as to say I'm falling in love with you."

(*Foaming at the mouth*) "Ghheehughhg!! Heee!"

He kneels down and takes my hand in both of his.

"Savoy, before you leave for Edmonton to deal with your crack whore mom and deadbeat father, *and* grieve the loss of your semi-estranged 'Pawpaw,'" he intones, deific, sensational, "will you be my girlfriend?" (:OOOOOO)[107]

"I-I-I...I—Yes. Y-Yes. I will."

Outside, Border Collie barks for the ball to be thrown again. The first bit of shade dances along the edge of the aperture. My soul is whipping and Nae Nae-ing somewhere in the vicinity.

"So does this mean...?"

"*Does this mean...*?"

"I can..."

"*You can...*?"

"Officially..."

[107] You know how in cartoons, characters will get so excited they bounce off the walls? That.

"*Officially...?*"

"Huggu? Kissu? Whenever...I want...?"

"Yes, you freak."

I hug him once, a second time, mumbling and humming to myself like a freak, a lovesick beast from a far-off spectrum. But then come the *loinal* rumblings...

"You said before, at my place, that, that...we could—if we had another chance—we could...do...*have*...sex? Or try...? Again?"

He brushes the floor moss off, inspects it.

"This *might* work."

Little is worse in this life than the way our media portrays romance—sex, more than anything. You would think from the callous, mechanical reductivism they espouse that sex was a business decision or an agreed-upon aim. The physical-libidinal embodiment of a financial trust. Characters have sex for vengeance, spite, material gain, boredom, sport—everything but unadulterated love. You could very well sit an impressionable person (*multitudinous* today) in a room, show them nothing but time-wasters like *Poor Things* as a part of their re-education and successfully produce in the end a person who believes abortion is healthcare (or prophylactic or, god forbid, *zany*), that women can only know consummate love with other women or minority men, and that disclaimers accounting for every degenerate fetish (ones that *replace* sexual fulfillment rather than *enhance* it) ought to be signed with live witnesses before any kind of physical romantic engagement can take place. Neoliberalism has been the death of romance.

It would re-break my many times atomized, macraméd-together heart to have to sign some e-document in order to be with Avery. I might in that instance jump from the large opening at the end of the hall.

But our union requires no such thing.

He's half-clothed, kneeling over me. "I don't have a condom. I'm retarded—I should've brought one. You probably don't take birth—"

"You don't need to use one with me, Avery."

"What do you mean?"

"A condom. You don't need to use one. It wouldn't be real if you wore one. Even if I took my IUD out, you won't need one."

"I'm all for making bad choices, but are you sure—"

"It's okay. Nothing in this city is real anymore. Nothing *anywhere* is real anymore. It's all fabricated, monitored, measured." (I reach toward his face, pulling him into the light.) "That's not love. You'd be rubbing against latex instead of me. I want us to be one, like adults. Like *people*. Living, breathing, *triumphing* people. I'm not scared of what might happen. Not now. Be mine."

His kiss is his assent. Together, on the moss, we are ebullient, immaculate, forever.

"Pull out, stay in—do as you like. Either way, I'm yours for all that is eternity."

(I may be ugly, but I'm not immodest, so I won't include details of my glorious first time with Avery. But if you're a smut hogg and need this kind of thing to get you going so you can crank *your* hogg, enjoy this Harlequin Romance version, you gooner.)[108]

34

Have you ever Joker laughed, but in a good way? An *intensely* good way? A way where you knew you were, just maybe, just maybe, free? *Loved?*

108

An excerpt from *The Tycoon's Mulatto Mistress*

By Savoy Matviyenko, as Christine D. Heifer

(Harlequin, 202X)

She sat up sharply, the movement knocking her busty, opposite-of-small double-D breasts out of her bra. "Are you sure you want me? After I made such a display the last time at that high-roller soirée of yours?"

His gleaming eyes fixed on her. "I do."

This sent a ripple of pleasure shooting through her nipples. "But your investors said you needed to be at tonight's soirée because you left the last one early. They said they

[*The Tycoon's Mulatto Mistress* continued 😏😍]

would buy all of your art, as well as all the art represented by your agency—the most famous and powerful art agency in New York, the one your father started 60 years ago and gave to you to run, regardless of your philosophical differences, his being profit over everything else, yours being charitable and forward-thinking, even if people don't always understand them."

He peeled another layer of clothing from his torso, exposing perfectly sculpted, miraculous cheese-grater abs—17 in total. The sight of them ignited Celeste's maidenly woman's womanhood vigorously. "There will always be more investors and buyers," he said through the lace of Celeste's bra strap. "I'm a tycoon for a reason."

Egad! He was so confident! A tiger in the middle of the Sahara or those other places tigers likely live. He was beastial, commanding. Her skin was so taut and hot thinking about him as a tiger! "Avery—I mean, Alain Agamemnon III—I'm your secretary. I'm not fit for a jungle cat of your stature. What could you possibly want with me? It's not too late to turn back now."

Alain Agamemnon III ran his tongue along her dusky areolas, which caused even more rippling and contorting, more than she could handle, and bit down on her exposed, aching, gyrating nipples. His manhood was protruding protrudingly from within his $6000 Boglioliglioli silk-and-wool-and-leather dress pants she had helped him buy a week ago when they had gone out shopping to find him a designer outfit because his wife had requested that he get something new because she didn't like what he normally wore, even though it made him look like a god-tiger tycoon. A tiger-god-tycoon. His wife! Wait, Alain Agamemnon III's wife!

Celeste collected her nipples from his gaping, slobbering mouth and dexterous tongue and tried to create distance. "Alain Agamemnon III, what about your wife, Yao Ming Bae Bee Gir, of the Antiserum pharmacy/café hybrid business dynasty? Isn't she waiting for you, too? You have to complete your merger to create your dream art/pharmacy/café chain, since the market is bullish, like you."

The tips of his fingers strode gallantly, seductively, semiotically down to her navel and traced predatory loops along her panty lines. "There are no feelings between Yao Ming Bae Be Gir and me. There never have been," he growled. "That was a business arrangement and nothing else. My advisor, Amanda, advised us advisedly to be together. We've never shared a bed. And it's my understanding she has a lover in Los Angeles or Texas." He snarled. Snarledly.

Then they could! Could! Be! Together! She moaned. No, it was still too far away, Celeste thought. Too much of a pipe dream. To be such a brilliant large-cat-like man's lover!

Before she could think, his coarse, firm, supple, slick, manicured, paradoxical fingers dove into the moistened fathoms of her perfectly-shaved-and-not-uncharacteristically-hairy pelvis, teasing the aching lips of her inner royal semi-demi-goddess. She had to get away before he consumed her, like the sultry carcass of a felled gazelle, who was also a secretary. But she wanted this. She, a gazelle secretary, wanted this more than anything she had ever dreamed of.

[cont. 💜🤪]

Alain Agamemnon III rasp-commanded: "I want you, Celeste. I need to be inside of you. All of you. Completely. Insidely." She spasmed with ecstasy, rosy-coloured and bewildered under the low light of his Gagillionaire's Row office-cum-apartment-space he never let Yao Ming into because the plot needed it to be that way.

"Just...your...secretary," she moaned like a buffalo in heat who's running out of wild animal comparisons, and she tried to pull back one last time, feeling the last pangs of self-consciousness slowly slip away—but the pleasure was all-consuming! The party would have to wait for them.

She wrapped her arms around the bulk of his rippling, sinewy, striped back, tugged at the nape of his neck and brought him closer, closer to her warmth. In her excitement, Celeste accidentally kicked him in the double-gods while positioning herself on his desk, and she thought she might've ruined the whole thing, but Alain Agamemnon III, son of Alain Agamemnon II, didn't spook, for he was already seeing red. And nipples.

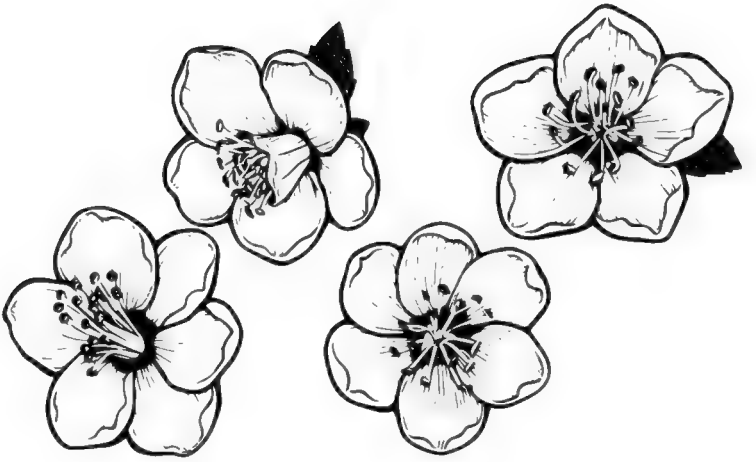
"Oh, god," Alain Agamemnon III, CEO of Agamemnon Art and Entertainment, ETC. LTD., registered as an official company with the New York Commission of Businesses and Officiality, growl-howled. "I'm going in." His body, raw and tense, met with hers joyously. Gently, at first; then, firmly; then, thunderously, executively—and the pens and papers she was lying on on his imported French-Belgian desk begin to shift and shake in rhythm with her growing rapture. His hardihood machismo, all 14 inches of it, was thrusting into her sleek, divine grace, erasing all of her childhood and ongoing trauma: living with a messy roommate while she tried to be the best secretary at a Fortune 500 company she could be and make her way in this cold, non-goddess-y world.

"Don't stop," she hailed.

"The soirée—"

"No!"

And he lasted exactly 21 minutes, the absolutely ideal amount of time to achieve a female orgasm but not overdo it and cause her pain. And then they stared up at the ceiling of his office, as she had done with her first love, and tried to find patterns in the tiles, but she was a woman this time, so it "hit different." And then they showered (dusted themselves off) and went to the party (her house) so he could drop her off so she could pack because she was going to visit her family in Edmonton, and that's the wedge that drives them apart in the story after the climax, but they eventually find a way to be together again after a minor misunderstanding, and everything's great in the end and they have wonderful, animalistic sex for the rest of time :))



III

35

Dat Airport Action

"I been fightin' my demons (innumerable, ineludable) /
I been fightin' my—(yeh)"

—Ken Carson, "Fighting My Demons"

Those who fly often are troopers—airports aren't exactly entertainment hubs. But you *can* make your own entertainment, if you *are* about to fly one province over on the cheapest airline in existence ($60 roundtrip to ride 6th class with the dogs and cats) and potentially die at the hands of Soviet-era planes and diversity-hire pilots, by visiting every single store in the pre-boarding area—especially the duty-free ones—and buying nothing.

And you *can* ride the high of your fantastic date at the loony bin with your new *boyfriend* by throwing your bags down in a vacant seating area after you confirm your ticket in the scanner kiosk and literally *spinning* around until you get dizzy from the spinning and the sleep-deprivation you accumulated because you were texting that BOYFRIEND most of the night about silly shit, even though you knew you had to be up at 5:00 AM to take an Uber to the airport and wake your roommate up to instruct him, one last time, just to be safe, how to tend to your plants and take care of your slugs.

(Word to the wise: Do 👏 not 👏 leave 👏 your 👏 luggage 👏 unattended 👏'cause 👏 then 👏 grumpy 👏 security 👏 personnel 👏 will 👏 yell 👏 at 👏 you 👏👮‍♀️💼🦹‍♀️👺)

You can also let the sleep-deprivation trick you into a state of paranoia as you approach the front of the security line, so that you begin to believe that, while you don't *think* you brought a box-cutter or nitroglycerin with you, you might somehow be in possession of either, and that the knockoff Canadian TSA sticks-in-the-mud will find it on you and lock you up and never let you see said *BOYFRIEND* again.

And then you might daydream about using that box-cutter to hijack the Soviet-era plane you're about to get on so you can fly it to your BBBBBBOYFRIEND'S 💝 house and pick him up, and then the two of you can re-enact 9/11 in the business district of your city to exterminate the pesky

capitalist dogs, then fly all the passengers to Trinidad so you can revel in a salutary destination and drink piña coladas out of coconuts, instead of bleak, desolate Edmonton, where you have to go lay your Pawpaw to rest.

And *then*, you might be informed that you can't bring jars of Bon Maman strawberry jam in your carry-on, so the TSA-lite agents interrogate you about that, and you become self-conscious in front of everyone because you've held up the line, which leads you to try to lighten the mood with a joke wherein you invite the agents to eat the jam with you to show them it's *not* nitroglycerin, and they take you aside and ask you a few more questions before they realize you're simply very dumb and let you go back to your screening, but you're so nervous from being singled-out that you forget to take out your piercings before you go through the scanner, which leads you to be singled out *again* for the X-ray ovary-shrinker machine, where you wonder if they find your X-ray silhouette on the diagnostic display fucked up or FRIGGIN HAWT (awooga, awooga! 👀), and they determine you've done nothing wrong—you're merely *turbo*-dumb.

And *finally*, after all that, you can visit the *better* post-screening stores and pretend to be interested in expensive liqueurs and Rolexes,[109] only to move to a *bigger* waiting area before sneaking into one of the VIP lounges by the name of *The Flyer's Zone* to take pictures of yourself for your ***BBBBOYYYYFRRIIEEEENNDDD*** 😎😇😈🎃 in the disability stall in the gender-neutral washroom and think about how he told you you were looking "calamitously pretty" yesterday, so you rub one out on the spot while looking at a picture of the side of his head you took while he was driving you home the other night, before getting hungry and hitting up the A&W in the food court and buying four Chubby Chicken Burgers™ (one to eat now; three for the plane ride) and posting aggressive skull memes about "shidding your pants" and femdom *Kirby* drawings to your story and think about checking CC again to see how envious users are of you but choosing not to 'cause you're for once fine for now while basking in the omniscient warmth of a morning well spent.

You could do that.

[109] They know you aren't—you're wearing a sweater with Smokey Bear on it and a pair of checkered wool slacks.

36

The plane ride itself was calmer. My ticket ended up being for an exit-row window seat, so the 10/10 stealth-goth flight attendant (middle school crush-coded...) and her buoyant gay male coworker, Jamais, who told me I had nice hair when he helped me reach the overhead compartment, put me in charge of operating the emergency exit in case anything went down or the chicken burgers I bought earlier turned out to be sesame-seed-bunned nail bombs.

They were manning one of the worst routes possible on one of the most universally berated airlines, Flare, but I'll be damned if they didn't liven the mood by cracking jokes during their safety demonstration.[110]

V fun.

It was so much fun I bought a miniature bottle of Jack Daniels from Jamais when he came around and asked if we wanted drinks.[111] I didn't drink it, but it was cool to have, and I thought I could share it with Avery when I got back. Or have it myself in case the funeral went bad and I needed to take the edge off.

The two people beside me fell asleep as soon as the pilot finished introducing herself over the intercom. Just dead to the world 💀. I drove the first of my three plane burgers down like Randy from *Trailer Park Boys* while we shot up and gained altitude. Hit my second by the time we started to level off.

The view from the window opened out onto a still-yawning Lower Mainland. The blue-and-grey ports of Richmond. The green patches of Delta farmland. The muted browns of Burnaby—specifics panning out, fading out into geometric, chromatic nuance. Down there, moms were driving clapped-out Honda Odysseys to drop their kids off at school. Schizoids were panhandling by the SkyTrain stations. Squirrels were fighting along the branches of chestnut trees in Fort Langley graveyards, and over Trinidadian curry remnants.

So marvelous from above.

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[110] Jamais pretended to hang himself with the strap of the drop-down mask.

[111] It was shocking they even offered them on a basic flight where you could probably barter with your wares to make your way on.

Clouds are humanity's arbiters, always watching, always keeping tabs to see we're still here. They disappear, reform, stretch, bunch up, trying to get a better view. No matter how fucked up we become, no matter what we destroy on land, the water cycle renews, and the clouds return for the scoop.[112]

Space has never excited me. It's too...abstract, *under review*. What does it matter if anti-matter can invert on itself from time to time and create anti-semi-matter that appears once every 178,945 human years—or *more* if it's close to black hole that's moving away from us, less if that black hole is adjacent to an A&W? If a planet 9,000,000,000,000,000 kilometres away is host to bismuth-based squid-like organisms? We're never getting there. The squids aren't getting to us. They wouldn't want to talk to us if they could. We let Obama, Chief of Halfie Niggies Everywhere, representative of all mankind, my second greatest opp, drone strike innocents in the Middle East and eat babies (allegedly—but we all know the Wikileaks stuff was legit) for fun. Why would they care to talk to us? They'd be better off *avoiding* us.

The terrestrial is where it's at. You can have a view like this—with the perfect, consummate pallor of clouds. Their wispy, immutable stewardship. I love you, clouds! Some people might not pay attention to you, but I do! Thank you for all that you are!

My coughing woke one of the bots next to me for a split second before he smacked his lips and fell back asleep. I'd been wheezing and coughing a tad since the Riverview date. Reminded me of when I used to smoke. A habit I picked up from Kath, my old pal. I was getting to that tenebrous checkpoint that all smokers hit where you hack up that cruddy black sludge in the morning. It *really* didn't agree with my asthma. But man, how good it would've felt to have a cigarette on that plane...to light up a Belmont and peer out at the clouds. Rip my own fat clouds. Can you smoke asbestos? What clouds would those make? Someone out there must have tried.

Miraculously, they retrofitted monitors on the backs of the seats so you could watch *Burnt* with Bradley Cooper using the airline's $2 earbuds that rival 1920s HAM radios for sound quality—or you could watch with no sound all.

My monitor didn't wanna turn on. It was for the better.[113]

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[112] We sometimes even conjure them up with chemtrails. Were we secretly spraying some right now?

[113] I was liable to set mine to the "Travel Tracker" section and end up staring endlessly at an animated rendering of our plane as it inched toward a similarly animated Edmonton that looked like it was from the display of a 2009 Garmin Nuvi GPS.

No, I had *prepared* to be without in-flight entertainment in a highly pressured sardine-can cabin with a school of strangers. In my carry-on were headphones and a freshly christened reggae/contemporary Japanese classic/girlpunk/junkiebeat/screamo playlist, "DO YOU MIND? I'M CHANTIN' HERE, MON!" that I'd downloaded the tracks for so I could listen to it whether or not the plane had WIFI.

Moreover, I'd saved screencaps of the poem[114] Avery had promised to send

114

Yes, yes—I'm a cynic

"If we could truly see ourselves the way others see us, we'd disappear on the spot."
—Emil Cioran

Yes, yes—I'm a cynic:
island by lonesome (one tree, two coconuts),
moonless commune,
desert in a ditch;
more Cioran than cheerful.
It's possible you're right,
that they *do* get in the way of things—
the polemics on geo-politics,
diatribes as diagnostics,
apologias that shake fists
(in defense of mosquitoes: they are delightful
once you get past the blood-sucking parasitics)—
that it might be better
to see the lighter side of things.
What does it do
to detain a psyche,
to peel apropos prick,
chip unto strip?
I rather like the proto-post-post-ironic me,
the one you fell in love with—
okay, *love* might not be the word for it
(love's nothing but a waypoint
in our exegetic drift, they say)—
but surely what we've fostered, it's
something akin

me after our SEX DATE so I could read it afterward.[115] I was stocked up and locked in.

In the company of my nubivagent friends, I started reading.

["Yes, yes—I'm a cynic" continued]

to tolerance;
if I *stop* being like this
you can kiss the rank sarcasm goodbye,
the glib liturgies during Hollywood flicks
(you like my monologues; you do; yes)—
But that's not true loss, you claim?
careful: I may bore you terribly
with talk of today's reality tv instead,
or shoes that space your toes like a caveman's,
anti-plastic initiatives,
or easy do-it-yourself micro-gardening tips
for deceptively nutritious arugula sprouts;
I assure you, you *don't* want that
cropping up in your too-brief life.

But that's okay, you say?
I'm not sure I believe you—
not yet—
that reality tv
can play the part of social glucose,
that the micro-green
has its place in the discourse,
that even the
saguaro
that found its way
into the barren, dusty trough
deserves to bloom.

Originally published in TERF-TURF Quarterly.

[115] Written just as he'd first gotten into contemporary poetry and was experimenting with styles—the first poem he ever had published, in some rinky-dink indie journal he'd found online. He'd also included links to a few of the poems he liked from recent years, like Bianca Stone's "Marcus Aurelius" and Yusuf Saadi's "Taxi Drivers' Therapy." I screencapped those as well.

37

Avery Wavery Shmavery XD

Today, 8:36 AM

okay that's the last photo.

i just bought 4 chubbies hehehe

it's such a nice day. the airport looks so bright.

there's a guy next to me in the food court using two spoons at the same time to eat his wendy's chili. mao lmao*

the workers here keep getting mad at me for leaving my bags unattended. they really hate to see a girl spin.

thinking of sneaking into another vip area. flight won't be leaving for another ½ hour, think i have time.

[View Photo]

9:15 AM

oops. boarding soon. just got called to the gate.

okay one more photo

[View Photo]

(it's of the morning sky. it's so pretty from the windows by my gate.)

thinking of you. hope you're sleeping and breathing well.

okieee time to board
i'll message you when i land. let's hope the pilot isn't female, i don't want to crash and die for once

well that's not totally true

but i'm trying not to think about going back to edmonton!!!!

gotta go now

love you

talk soon

11: 14 AM

just landed!!! we made it in one piece

gonna try to find my luggage now, knowing my luck someone stole it

11: 24 AM

Just woke up. Massive work session last night.

Sounds like you were quite busy at the airport.

You're the most gorgeous girl to ever go in that disability stall, I'd wager.

That skyline is rather nice — you're right.

> You're the most gorgeous girl to ever go in that disability stall,I'd wager.

you really think so? 😊🥺

Have you found your luggage yet?

waiting by the cock/luggage carousel now.

I'm confident it'll be there

i read your poem on the plane

What did you think?

I'll state again that it wasn't my best work.

I'd be happy to show you a few of my better ones, too.

you should go back to poetry!

We'll see. Got my hands full for the time being.

well i loved the one you sent me.

it was so you but a younger you if you know what i mean. it was like talking to a young Avery. or listening in on a conversation of his with an older woman.

I was so anxious to get something published in those days that I threw in the word "commune" to excite the leftie parts of their lizardbrains and made references to reality tv.

To be fair — despite what the poem says, I do like some reality tv. I used to watch "Jersey Shore" when I was in middle school, and I'll still throw on "The Bachelor" when I need something to watch in the background while I exercise.

it made me wanna read more of your work.

and it made me wanna write a little somethin somethin myself

and fix my grammar so i don't sound ike such a zoomer retard when i text you.

You should. I think you might really enjoy writing poetry. It's exhilarating in its own way. Try mimicry first if you're confused.

❤️

You're still better off than 95% of the people I text. But if you are interested in that sort of thing, there are some solid free resources available online now. I could also give you a few grammar book recs if you wanna do it the old-school way, too.

❤️

What did you think of the other poems?

half of them were confusing

i couldn't look up the words or refernces on the plane

i'll look them up when i get to Janice's/

All good, bruv.

Someone gonna pick you up from the airport?

nah

found my bag

some old dude in a suit was eyeing it for a sec

joke's on him, i have no possessions

my suitcase it mostly filled with air

Did you find somewhere to stay?

Janice said i could stay at her place if i wanted and Winston also offered but he has a roommate right now so i don't really wanna sleep on their couch and have to deal with a rando guy

Makes sense.

i checked out a few airbnbs as a backup so if things don't go well i'll book one of those.

Good call.

Let me know when you get there.

yep 😶😉

wish u could've cum with

😝🥲🗿

Wouldn't have wanted to cramp your style.

My sister just got in. Gonna go meet up with her for an hour or two.

Gotta tinker with the new website as well. Time to take chances and put my sculptures out there.

Catch you in a bit 😉

Tell her i say HI SIS!

jk

or...?

and send me the things you want me to help you promote vro!!!

or ask me anything about the new website setup!!!!! can't believe i actually inspired YOU to do more to show your work to the world!!!!!

can't wait to see it!!!

38

Home.

Janice and Winston no longer live together, which is a recent-ish development. Nana said during our last call a few months ago that it was because Janice was trying mushroom-infused ice cream, gummy bear weed edibles, and a handful of other food-focused drug products in her latest effort to get off the goop and address her chronic pain, and on several occasions, Winston got high accidentally eating these. This pushed him over the edge and caused him to vacate their townhouse duplex *thing* (a former grow-op home) on Abbotsfield Road.

He'd found an apartment in the Spruce Haven complex off 66 St. NW in the Balwin neighbourhood with a roommate he found on Craigslist (ever the versatile site). Janice had, with the help of Nana and Pawpaw, moved into someone's detached garage near a silly-lookin' parish church in Calder.[116]

Winston answers the (garage) door when I roll up.

"Savi," he says. "Lookah you. Weh yah ah say? Yah prac-ti-cally a grown womahn now!"[117]

"Hey, Dad."

"Ya muhdah's in da showa. She be out soon."

Stepping into the garage, the first thing I'm hit with is the usual violence of Febreze.[118] The current smell is akin to the one you get when you buy every type of that tree-shaped air freshener people hang on their cars and they all amalgamate into a haunted forest of roily olfactory malaise.

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[116] Churches are cool, but only the ones that don't double as brick outhouses in appearance. And any church that has wood paneling inside it and ceiling fans should be scorched uninterruptedly in the flames of Gehenna.

[117] Some words are still hard to pronounce—even though I'm 99% sure English is his first language—so he drags out multi-syllable words in an amusing, tropical way, or smooshes them together or mixes in Trinidadian Caribbean-speak when it's easier to do so. He said once that he spent time in Jamaica when he was a kid, which has influenced his accent. He's never clarified what that meant.

[118] She's got an affinity for air fresheners that defies all logic. I've told her 'til I was blue that they're carcinogenic. Never gets through.

The setup is what you'd expect of a converted garage: miniature kitchen with a hotplate for a stove, seating area (ft. ratty solo loveseat) as soon as you walk in, TV mounted directly to the unpainted drywall, patio table like mine serving as the dinner table, hints of pink insulation where they rushed the renovations, to give the space some "pizzazz."

Thankfully, the renovators added a partition wall (also unpainted, for the feng shui) to block off the bedroom and washroom.

"What're you watching?" I ask, while texting Avery a quick update to let him know I've entered the belly of the beast and am doing swell!!!

Winston reinstalls himself on the couch.

"Ah...Dis one...*Young and Da Restliss*."

"Is Victor still on the show?"

"Yah, but ee migh not stay. Gettin' old."

"I would think so. He's been on there for, what, 40 years?"

He nods in no clear direction and goes back to watching the episode.

Jack, looking as handsome as ever, though, a bit skinnier than I remember, is fiddling with a decanter in his office when Victor comes into the shot. (Haaa) The two remain rivals after all these years. Victor grumbles something about opportunity and family. Jack offers him a drink, which he uncharacteristically accepts. (Jack would be liable to poison him on a normal day.) Jack responds with a line about how they're both in deep here. Victor grunts. There's some discussion of business.

"Is Jack still with Phyllis? I thought she was pretty, but I never really liked her."

"Who know?"

"Shouldn't you? You've stayed watching it, right?"

"Ahck!" He waves his hand dismissively. (Glad to see he hasn't changed.)

I don't know why I expected a grand reception upon returning. My having to take an Uber here should have been a sign.

Victor listens as Jack starts to lay out some kind of plan to save their respective families. Their families have been kidnapped over a development venture? I'm

not 100% on this. Who's going to double-cross whom? *Monkeh know which tree to climb.* (I sometimes slip into Winston's sayings when I'm around him.)

"Nice place." I start to wander and poke about. "Has Mom been here long?"

"Ah...Little while. Ey, gyal! Yuh fadda is a glass-make-ah ah wha?"

"Oh, sorry. Was I blocking the TV?"

"Can yoo ged me ah pop?" he asks.

I oblige. We sit and watch the next scene, about a mom character reading to her son. Neither character looks familiar. Winston sips his 7-Up.

The shower stops running.

A commercial comes on for Burger King. Winston rubs his stomach and hums.

The place has one window near the "kitchen," looking out onto the street. (Depending on how things go, I may need to jump through it.)

My fingernails are growing long. I should trim them.

An ad for the Cardi B McDonald's meal next.

Dr. Tannen said I could come on Wednesday at 2:30 PM. It's Monday—12:30 PM.

The "bedroom" door opens. Batten down the bipolar bitch hatches, bois...

"Heuhy—Thavi. Yeuhmadeih. I wath wonnerin where you mightha been!"

"Hi. Yeah—here I am," I say with as much charisma as I can muster.

"Ith been tho long! Gimme a hahg. Tho long! Oh, I can believe ith! Daugther! Tho long! Big fanthy Wancouver girr now! Prethy! So prethy."

We hug.

"They haven't made your replacement teeth yet? I thought the government was gonna pay for it?"

"Ahhyeah wehw, fuchhing govamen shiw oweth me thath money frum befow. Then thouthan!"[119]

[119] She's been telling me the government has owed her $10,000, by her estimation, since I was an infant.

"Can't Nana do anything about it?"

"Nahnah can do nothin bouth ih. Tha thief!"[120]

"You're sounding more clear-headed at least. Not as many brain farts."[121]

"Hyeah."

"But it's cool—you sound like Layne Staley did when Alice In Chains was recording their final album. He was missing his teeth, so he couldn't pronounce the 's' sounds very well. The band rewrote some of the songs so he could avoid those. The album turned out to be really good."

"Hah? Ahw you mathin fun a me alrethy?"

"I was only saying—there's this band that I love, and the lead singer was in a similar position to you, and he made something positive happen. It was supposed to be a good thing."

"Fahthin mathin fun a me!"

She's wearing liquor-store-at-7:00-AM polyester polar bear pajama pants—best worn with DC skate shoes—and she's got a towel wrapped around her chest.[122]

She goes to the cabinet and rummages around. "Fahthing gummieths. Where ya puth em?"

Winston's tuned out, lost in a Phyllis scene.

"Your weed gummies?"

She's not listening.

"I think I see them. They're on the second shelf. Here." (I reach over her shoulder to grab them.)

"Geugh! You hie them?"

"No, I didn't hide them. I got here two minutes ago. How could I have hidden them?"

"Fuhthing bith, you *dih* hie them!"

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[120] Nana hasn't stolen any money from her.

[121] That's what she calls the occasional gaps in her speech caused by the years of use. They become more pronounced when she's sober.

[122] Her boobs are much larger than mine, yet she presents them *this* sloppily.

"No, Mom."

"Don' lie tha me!"

It's futile.

"Yes, Mom."

That's that. She makes a noise and goes back into the "bedroom" to change.

Avery's texting me. I wanna answer, tell them about him, but Janice returns in a Tragically Hip T-shirt she undoubtedly got from a thrift store, and the same pajama pants.

"Glad youa ere, Thavi," she says. "Been tho long! Mah dawwing daughtheh!"

"Yeah."

We watch the rest of the episode. Things happen in it. Victor, Jack, Phyllis, person, other person. Talking. House. Café. Stuff. I dunno. I'm back in the Edmonton mire.

There isn't enough space on the loveseat for all of us. I've taken a seat on the edge of a nightstand in the corner of the room.

Janice doesn't have any food, so I eventually ask if they wanna order pizza. Winston says he doesn't have any money but would like some. Janice says she doesn't have any money but would also like some.

I buy.

Winston takes three meat-lovers slices to go, back to his place.

Janice gums a few down before going into her room.

While she's gone, I work on a commission for a Pickle Rick version of a man from San Bernadino (ordered by his friend Will, or @kylotheguyloren).

She comes back out and speaks about...things.[123]

I'm given the couch to attempt to sleep on. *After* a new coating of the free-radical furniture Febreze is applied.

I leave the TV on and go out.

Funeral's tomorrow.

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[123] "Thow Unckle Biwly (a family friend) goth a new thob" / "Great, Mom"; "Dew thew like the plathe?" / "Yes, Mom," etc.

39

Once Upon a Time in Savoyville (3)

Nightwalking in Calder, like most parts of Edmonton that aren't the city centre, is a lot of one- or two-telephone pole streets in a row.

Sometimes, there's the reprieve of a tree.

No street lamps, so you have to use the light from the endless stretches of single-family homes to guide the way.

Everything's flat. You can go as long as you like without ever risking burning out your legs. You can go, go, go.

When I was still living with my parents and attending St. Francis Xavier Catholic High (because the best way to save a wayward soul is to send it to a Christian senior high),[124] I'd have to get out like this every other night. In those days, it was the only way of keeping my autonomy.

These continued even after I moved in with Matthew Bondarenko. (Yes, *another* Matthew. The *worst* one.) Because he may find and kill me now that I've returned to the city, I invite you to join me, if you please, for a nightwalk down Savoyville's own 💥🛑 Memory Lane 🛑💥 so you may see what life was like here.

Matthew and I first properly met at a house party hosted by a girl named Chiyo Falefa (killed herself in Grade 12—bleach—after nude photos of her were leaked). I'd overheard people talking about it in the hallway and invited myself. It wasn't as if I had *no* friends in those days. It's almost impossible to go to a high school and speak to no one. I had half-friends in some of my classes—people I liked to be paired up with but never took it to the next level with by arranging after-school plans. And I had my virtual online acquaintances. But in my adolescent mind, I was gonna make real-life friends by pulling a *Superbad*[125] and worming my way into the party. I'd earn everyone's respect and show them how much fun I could be. And voilà, I'd have ✨ friends ✨. And maybe something more. And things wouldn't be so interminably sad.

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[124] Part of the reason why I say I was raised secular.

[125] Though I wanted to be Jonah Hill's character, or the McLovin guy, I knew I was Michael Cera's.

I showed up (45-min walk) to the party about 7 or 8 (7:46 PM—according to my then-phone's Heath Ledger "Why So Serious" Joker lock screen). I looked at my kingdom (a house full of drunk people spilling out onto the lawn); I was finally there! To sit on my throne (hide in the corner) as the Prince/ess of Welfare.

Slipping in was easy enough. This was before the days of sigma motivators, so I pulled an old-school Dale Carnegie fake-it-'til-you-make-it, win-friends-and-get-people-to-suck-you-off routine and put on a smile, bobbed my head like I was vibing to the Fetty Wap they had on, and walked through the front door. Sized the place up. Looked like every other middle-class home I'd ever been in (maybe three). Loved that Chiyo was so self-conscious of being cool that she'd turned her family photos around.[126]

That's about where the confidence ended.

When you don't have anyone to talk to at a party, things become awkward fast. It was BYOB, and I was My-Own-Boozeless, so in order to make it look as if I was preoccupied with something, I stole a LaCroix sparkling water someone had opened and left out. A few people face-scrunched in my direction, but no one was pointing and laughing, which was a win.

The first person I talked to was Kyler Chong, whom I ran into while trying to find the washroom. He came out of "the shitter" (his words), saw me, did one of these: 🤨, and then grinned and patted me on the shoulder. Kyler was a dude-bro through and through—very laid-back. We'd shared a few classes together. He was known for getting Ds in every subject except gym, being the star of the lacrosse team, and being able to fold his eyelids inside out.

"Didn't expect to see you here," he said.

"Me neither. I kinda...you know..."

"Awesome, man."

Can't tell you why, but I got hyped up and proceeded to tell him he looked like an upside-down Wild White Nacho Dorito in his self-cut stringer. He didn't know what to say and patted me on the shoulder again, said, "See ya in there, champ," and walked off.

The second person I talked to, while hiding in the backyard behind a tree for 30 minutes and playing with the roof shingles of Chiyo's dog Buddy's doghouse (where was Buddy? Out on the town with Chiyo's parents?), was

[126] I turned one back around, of the family vacationing in Cancún.

Stephanie DiMaggio (distant relative of the baseball player; another halfie I sometimes talked to in English class). She was on the back deck smoking grape Bullseyes[127] and asked what I was doing. Told her I was getting some air, and she offered me one. I had only tried Janice's cigarettes out of curiosity before, so I declined. She went back inside.

The third person was Chiyo herself. I'd returned through the sliding door and stolen another LaCroix—this time from the fridge. The party was reaching its max capacity; we were now shoulder-to-shoulder in the open-concept living room. Chiyo and her helpers moved the furniture around to create a beer pong area and makeshift dance floor. The McPherson twins, who sometimes said nasty things about me in gym, had already passed out on one of the couches.

I was peeking in from the edge of the room, by the hallway, when Chiyo came up to me with her best friends, Sylvie Ramirez and Abigail Hafiz.[128]

"What are you *doing* here, *Savin*? Why are you in my *house*?" Chiyo asked. She was half-drunk.

"Who even *are* you?" Sylvie parroted.

"Uhh...S-So...Party...*Superbad*..."

"Excuse me?"

"M-M-McLovin...?"

"What the *fuck*?"

They were doing that bimbos-ganging-up-on-someone-they-don't-like routine where they stand in a semi-circle around you and form Hoe-Voltron to block you in.

"I-I-I-I...thought..."

They were ready to put me on blast. Maybe they were in the right to. I was an uninvited guest. That's when I heard a "She cool" from behind me. It was Matthew.

"Don't sweat it, Chi. She cool," he said again, coming in between me and Hoetron's Eye Beam.

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[127] Much cooler than hitting the chunky LED vapes you could play *Pong* on the side of.

[128] Not even worth describing—your typical olive-skinned, boy-magnet bimbos. Presumably consultants (not a real job!) or "executive" assistants/receptionists/side-pieces now.

The best defense against the cool girls' attacks was to have a cool boy they liked vouch for you.

"Whatever. Just don't steal anything. Come on, Matthew—Claire made Jell-O shots. Cherry! You likey?"

And just as quickly as they swarmed, they left me standing there, holding my trembling LaCroix.

That, as pitiable as it may be to say, and watching his rangy frame brush past me, were enough to make me fall for Matthew Bondarenko.

So when he DM'd me a week later through IG, asking if I wanted to "hang on white ave" [*sic*], I took him up on his offer gleefully and without hesitation.

We mostly went to movies and wandered around the mall the first month. He was sweet, initially. Put up with my stammering and jabbering. He'd sit there as I spun my wheels and fake karate chop my forehead if I was rambling too much. He'd send me cute texts before bed about how much he cared. He made me feel that a boy could like me, and that I didn't have to panic about losing him.

I started hanging out with his degenie friends at school, and they were nice enough. We'd skip class together to hit the smoke pit, play games at someone's house; they'd invite me out on weekends. It felt like I had friends.

In a weird way, the *Superbad* plan had worked.

I first caught wind of Matthew's cheating around the third month.

Small hints cropped up. He wasn't listening as much. The cutesy routine stopped. The chops got a little harder. We would make plans and then he wouldn't show up. Or he'd text me right before we were supposed to go somewhere, like the aquarium at West Edmonton Mall (I had gotten a job at the Dr. Martens store there a month into our relationship so I could pay for our outings 'cause Janice was zero help in that regard) and tell me he wasn't gonna show. His excuses were equivocal. When I'd ask his friends if he'd cancelled on me to go out with them, they'd say "No clue" or "Ask him." The pattern-seeking side of my brain pushed me into full detective mode. I started to track his every move.

I hatched a plan to invite him out to a movie on a Saturday, knowing he was going to cancel on me. I lied and told him I was on my way to the theatre but took the bus to his place. I kept sending him update texts. He stopped

replying. He always left a key under the mat (such a predictable fool) at the back door, so I let myself into the house.

It was quiet. Typically, he'd be playing *COD* in the living room or smoking weed in his basement, but it was silent. I noticed the door to his room was closed. If you're going to get cheated on, I thought, you might as well confirm it with your own eyes. I opened the door to his room to find him doing doggy with an unknown platinum blonde.

You'd think I'd scream, or run away, or throw hands, but I didn't. I sat cross-legged on the floor and laughed until he got angry enough to hurl a pillow and push me out of the room.

I waited in the kitchen and ate one of his family's bananas. He would have to come out eventually.

The girl came out first—now fully clothed. I smiled and waved. She kept her head down and went out the front.

Domestic violence happens quickly and usually ends just as quickly. He emerged and threw me into the refrigerator, cracking my glasses, and pulled me by my hair over to the sink. I think he thought he could drown me if he put the tap over me and pushed my head against the bottom of the sink, because he did that, but all it did was soak me, so he gave up and kicked me—literally *in the ass*. (Had a bruise afterword that made it look like I'd been bull-riding.) Like most moids, he wasn't good with words, so he yelled a bunch of incomprehensible things, threw bananas at me, until his sister, who was downstairs studying in her room, came up and got involved.

I kept egging him on from the other end of the kitchen by repeating the text he'd sent me that morning: "Cya at the mall! Cya at the mall!"

But you can't stay in the kitchen of an irate cheater for too long, so I picked up my glasses, bowed, excused myself, stole another banana (threw it in the bush in the backyard for fun, to attract bears), and headed down the street.

Sitting on a concrete street partition was Platinum Blonde, smoking a cigarette.

"You're very pretty," I said.

"Pardon?"

"Your hair. I really like it. I used to straighten mine, and I've always wanted to dye it blonde. Not sure it's the look for me, though."

She stared at me for a sec.

"You find your boyfriend[129] cheating on you with a girl you've never met...and you compliment the girl?"

"Why not? You're hot. I can see why he chose you."

"You're shitting me."

"What else am I supposed to do? Cry and ask you why?"

She thought about this and flicked her ashes.

"That's incredibly badass or plain stupid. I can't decide which."

"Both?"

Her name was Kath, and she was a student at Holy Trinity. She'd met Matthew at a party two weeks prior. (If I recall, that night he claimed he was "busy wit fam stuff.") She only agreed to hang out with him because he seemed chill over Insta,[130] and he'd offered to pick her up in his parents' Ford Bronco and show her some nice spots around town. One thing had led to another.

"Where did he take you?" I asked.

"Whitemud Park."

"Ha! That's where he took me. That's where I lost my virginity—in the back of that stupid Bronco with the busted backseat."[131]

"Son of a..."

"Did he take you down to the boat launch by the water?"

"Yep."

"I bet he also started feeling you up while you guys were on the bridge. Saying nice things."

She nodded.

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[129] He had never *officially* called us boyfriend and girlfriend, but to our classmates and the outside world, we looked like a couple, and to me, we were one.

[130] I kicked myself for not monitoring his FB and IG friend lists more thoroughly.

[131] You can imagine the details.

"Classic. I've got his M.O. all figured out. You know what this means—we're not the only ones. He's been doing this a lot."

"Let's ask him—there he is."

Matthew, now dressed for the outdoors, came huffing over with some money crumpled in his hand.

He threw it at Kath. It fluttered toward her feet as she put out her cigarette.

"This is for Plan B, bitch. Fuckin'..." (Something in him had broken. I'd never heard him swear this freely and aggressively.)

"Who else have you taken to Whitemud?" I asked.

"The fuck does it matter to you?"

"You're not very creative," I goaded. "You did the exact same date with both of us."

"Shut the fuck up."

"I knew you were kinda dumb, but not this dumb," I said.

"What the FUCK is wrong with you?"

"You're the one with the peabrain, buddy. Don't look at me."

"You FUCK! FUCK!"

"All right, bub. Good stuff."

"Fucking whores! The both of you. Go buy your abortion pills, you stupid slut!"

Kath picked up the money and stored her butt.

"Are you done?" she asked.

"Done with you fucking WHORES."

He stomped his way back toward the house. That's what abusive moids do when they've lost—stomp away. I was a mix of abject heartbreak and banana burps.

"We picked a good one," Kath sighed, shoving the money into her pocket.

"Ain't that the truth. And I was fooled into believing he was sweet."

"He didn't finish in me, and I'm on birth control, so I don't think I need abortion pills. Wanna use this to buy some pancakes? I feel like pancakes after all that."

"I've only had a banana today. I could eat."

Kath and I ate eight chocolate chip pancakes each at Denny's (we beat Tim Barbie to it) and stole as many sugar-free sweetener packets as we could get our hands on. We hung out for 30 hours straight. I smoked my first cigarette, *the right way*. Neither one of us slept. Got to go with her to the first party I'd ever been (semi-)invited to.

I could make up a bunch of excuses for why I moved in with Matthew one month after that.

I could tell you I wasn't thinking straight, that I'd been driven away from my house because of Janice's addiction, Winston's neglect, and having to watch him beat her up when she used the money from her "jobs" on herself. I could. But, to tell the truth, I liked the intrigue. I liked the sensation of being in the action. Of being wanted.

He was capable of being nice to me. He apologized profusely a few days later. Bought me perennials and succulents 'cause he knew how much I adored plants. He wasn't always abusive. I needed somewhere to go, company, and he was that. Sometimes. He'd get physical, then apologize. So goes the cycle.

I started hanging out with Kath and her friend Jerrod, who rapidly became my friend Jerrod. We'd race down Jasper Ave. in his gutless Toyota Sienna, munch late-night Don's, have cigarette-smoking races, go to lookouts/roll around in the grass at 2:00 AM on school nights, seek out demented hentai and compel one another to watch it to the very end. They bought the mickey of Fireball that helped me endure the pain of my first tattoo (a Ghibli spirit).

I had friends. Real friends. They got me through the worst of life in Edmonton. (My forums helped, too.)

Matthew, in his own way, had been a part of helping me connect with them. It was a matter of picking one's poison, and I made my choice. But I stayed with him too long. Most do.

I stayed after the big accident that took Collie's life. I nursed Matthew back to health. He went from not knowing his own name, not being able to move

his limbs, to using them to dip mine in hot oil, bash me against the dashboard of his shiny new settlement-lucre car. It was that or risk the same treatment at home. At least this way I'd get a "sorry" sometimes.

I left. Forget what did it. Finding Dax on 4chan's /soc/? A then-somewhat-skinny gamer guy, also a fresh-ish uni student, an inchoate young adult with no direction, from Westmount, who was looking for a roomie to split the bill with so he could move to Vancouver and finally leave this gelid one-dimensional shithole behind.

Kath and Jerrod deserved better.[132] They were the only good part of the entire city. But what was left for me there? Was I ever going to get out if I stayed with Matthew or my parents? I'd tried moving in with Kath (we dated for a week but didn't want to ruin things, so we broke up and went back to being best friends), hiding away in Jerrod's basement, but I didn't want to be an imposition to the extent that I lost my friends. They meant too much to me. My grandparents were getting too old to take me in again. Living with those Indian guys was laughable. And every time I tried to leave but stayed in the city limits, Matthew ended up tracking me down. (He grew detective habits after the brain injury.) None of the restraining orders worked. He ignored each one. I *had* to leave.

I wish I'd had time to let Kath and Jerrod know properly.

More than that, I wish they had understood.

[132] I was a fool to get my Lasik treatment, which was supposed to be symbolic of my never letting Matthew break another pair of my glasses again, right before leaving. The trip out of town was a literal blur.

40

i'm baaaaack 🥸🤡

Yesterday, 6:46 PM

sigma savoy

ohayo gozaimasu~~ hey guys

we haven't spoken in quite a while but i wanted to let you know that your bonked up shawty is coming back to edmonton for her pawpaw's funeral!!!! i know i haven't been a good friend and i should have reached out sooner but things ended on such a rough note. you know how fukked things were with matthew. i felt trapped and scared because he was following me around town and shit. yes, it was bad but i should have told you i was planning on moving away, it ended up coming together more quickly than i expected and i jumped at the chance. if i could go back and do it again i would ask you guys to come with me. i know i hurt you; i can't make up for that enough. but i wanna try

i wanna see you guys so bad

so bad. you couldn't possibly know

it would mean the world to me if we could hang out again, maybe go get a cardi b meal and see what toy we get. i hope they're giving out bbls; i need one desperately.

i've been seeing someone, and he's really good for me, i think you'll really like hearing about him.

(i'll try not to talk your ears off, but I JUST WANNA SEE YOU GUYS SO BADDD!!!!!)

[sent with Slam! effect]

the funeral is tomorrow, i should be done in the early afternoon.

if tomorrow's too hectic or doesn't work, I have the day after that. i'm here 'till thursday.

i miss you.

sigma savoy changed the group chat theme to "Joker"

Today, 12:09 AM

Jerrod Harbinger
Never seen you use a semicolon in your life. This the same Savoy?

kath
i was gonna say - this is new.

sigma savoy
i've been on that grammar grind.

real one shit.

(i'm trying to clean up my act cuz the boy i'm seeing is/was a poet and i wanna be worthy of him and not have him think i'm as dumb as i am. i have to break these zoomer habits.)

but right now

i'm

too

EXCITED

[sent with Confetti effect]

Jerrod Harbinger
Progress

kath
did he put a gun to your head and force you?

sigma savoy

no – he's not like matthew at all.

he's kind and sweet and fun.

Jerrod Harbinger

That's good

kath

i was scared for a second that you had found your way into another boy trap, or that he wanted to change you.

sigma savoy

nope. I'm still me baybay

just gotta get seriou s about my life is all

how have you guys been???

Jerrod Harbinger

Getting by. New job at a language school. Not bad.

kath

my master's program is kicking my azz right now. studying rock formations in the yukon.

sigma savoy

as in you're in the yukon?

kath

not yet - but i'll be going there for a bit soon.

sigma savoy

all the more reason to hang out with me before u go 😈😈😈

let's go hard in da mf paint

is rollie pollie's still open?

wanna go rollerskating?

you guys still smoke?

Jerrod Harbinger
Lol

kath
savoy's back.

sigma savoy
we're so back it's unreal

sigma savoy changed the group chat name to "fortnite chug juggers"

kath
you're free tomorrow? i'm not over what happened,
but since you're here, we might as well talk it out.

rollie pollie's is under construction.
we could go somewhere else.

41

Pawpaw...

I pass out for maybe an hour before Janice starts scouring the kitchen for her George Foreman grill.[133]

"Mom, it's" (I tap my phone) "noon."

(Texts from Nana: 12; missed calls: 5.)

"Brlehfath, brlehfeth, Thavi."

"Isn't the funeral at 1:00?"

"Yeeh."

"Where is it again?"

"Nana thaned ith thew Wethlawn Cemethery. Money."

(Westlawn Cemetery. Of all the fucking coincidences...)

"I'm gonna look up how long it takes to get there. At this rate, we're gonna be late."

[133] Thrilled to see she continues to prepare food like it's 2008.

A tap at the door. It's Winston. He's nailed the Caribbean man funeral fit: His sunglasses have the wrapping effect, and he's wearing a black-and-red Rasta cap. His suit's ill-fitting, and he's rockin' a large, clearly fake Jesus piece on top of his black dress shirt.

"Waz di scene? Why you makin de food, Janie?"

"I'm hungwe."

"How did you get here?" I ask.

"Whada you mean, 'How do I get heyah?' I take da boos."

"Neither of you drives anymore?"

"No," he says. "Sol da cah."

"It's 12:05. The funeral starts at 1:00. If we take the bus, Google Maps says it would take us 48 minutes. We'd have to walk for ten minutes, then get on the 51, then transfer to the 52. Mom's not even dressed yet. I should call Nana."

"Ah Payap."

"If you knew we weren't driving, why did you come so late, Dad?"

"Tcheh!"

"Mom, we can eat on the wa—No, wait—I can call us an Uber. That should work."

"Hungwe! I'm havin waffuth!"

"Mom, we don't have time to make waff—oh! Looks like there are lots of cars today. We could have one here in—"

"Thut up! I'm havin waffuth!"

"No, Mom. The funeral's in less than an hour. By the time you finish making waffles and get dressed and do your makeup, it'll be 1:00."

"Ungrathfurl lithle thit! Thut up!"

"We can get waffles on the way. I'm sure I could ask the driver to pull into—"

She hurls a ladle at the couch.

"Yes, Mom."

♀

We're 36 minutes late to Pawpaw's funeral service.

Tried explaining why to Nana from the Uber. She stopped answering me.

Mom's put on a prom dress (not hers—I've seen hers in the pictures from before she was gooped up).

Nana's waiting for us at the flower-lined entrance to the Westlawn Funeral Home. She looks tired but healthy, hardly any older than when I saw her last. Her Irish-red hair is still vibrant.

"Look who decided to join us. And you're only half an hour late!"

"She insisted on eating waffles." I say. "I tried to get them to move faster, but Mom wasn't getting dressed, and she wouldn't let me book us an Ube—"

"And what have you shown up in, my precious long-lost granddaughter? What's this *ensemble* you've put together?"

"Oh, I found this at a vintage store recently and figured it might be suitable for formal events.[134]

"It's customary to wear black for funerals, and this one's a little...*breezy*, wouldn't you say?[135] Nevertheless, I'm glad you're here. Nearly four years I haven't seen you, and it has to be like this. And aren't you looking *well*, Winston..."

"Eh? Tank you, ma'am."

"Fortunately, we have the space until 3:00. Denys' old work friends made it out, as well as a couple of his cousins and their families. I know you've been gone for ages, Savoy, but you *might* still remember them. Next to them, it's us. There's finger-food and drinks, but you'll have to wait for those. Hurry up already. Everyone's *waiting*."

In the service room, I count 22 people, not including us. I've met a few of them over the years, but Pawpaw didn't tell me much about them. I don't see his brother or his brother's family anywhere.

I do see Wally, though, sitting in a front-row pew. He turns around and brightens right up when he sees me. He's waving pretty hard. He has

---

[134] It's a trad-wife knockoff dress. Mostly bought it for the meme, and picnic dates with Avery, to make me look approachable, *healed.*

[135] The *one* time I don't wear black...

Facebook, but I can't bear to be on there these days, so we don't get to talk much. I should download the Messenger app so I can chat with him more. I'd go sit with him, but who knows how Janice would react.

We take the row behind him. I stay by Wally for a sec to pat him on the back while we slide by.

"Move ya bambam, Savi!"

"There's no need, Dad. We have enough room. It's not exactly a packed house."

An MC provided by the funeral home starts the proceedings as we're getting settled.[136]

Pawpaw's body isn't present.

This isn't a funeral where there's a casket on a florid catafalque, and you get to go up and have a cool final moment with the deceased, who's in a tuxedo or royal robes. Pawpaw has already been cremated. He's sitting on a small stand at the front of the room. For identificatory purposes, they've taped a piece of paper onto the top and front of the box, letting us know that it is him in there—his 76 years, stuffed into what might as well be a shoebox.

Come to think of it, it's disorienting looking at my own body in a dress. I can't stop holding my hands out and touching the hems. I must be giving "Bratz doll dipped in cotton candy."

I didn't know Pawpaw as well as some of the other people in this room, but I do know that he would have hated this.

Pawpaw told me something once—we were walking home after school during a rough day for me.[137] I'd explained to him that the other kids at school thought I was *greebly*, that they hadn't been including me in freeze tag, that I'd felt left out. We'd been doing an out-loud class read of *Dr. Seuss's Who Loves You?* and Mr. Whomever-It-Was had imparted that the best way for an artist to get famous was to die, so I asked Pawpaw if the other kids would like me more if I died. He held my hand and told me dying wouldn't fix

[136] "Welcome. My name is [El Generico.] Thank you all for making it today..." etc., etc.; "Grief is nature's way of..." etc., etc.; "It is our hope that this service adequately honours and celebrates the storied life of Denys Matviyenko, who touched our hearts in so many..." etc., etc.

[137] This was when I was living with them, after my spell in foster care, when they finally decided they wanted me. I would have been wearing my purple *Dora* backpack, 'cause they bought me that one from Walmart that year.

anything, that you can't learn to like someone for who they are if they're not there. It was much better to live. I was confused, but it was the tone he used that pacified me. He told me he wouldn't be around forever, and that life was precious, but that when he did go, he didn't want people to sit around and mope and cry. He didn't believe in the Ukrainian idea that the soul stays in the body for three days after one's death. He thought it left right away—sometimes before. And he spent the rest of the walk home explaining wacky death rituals he'd heard about, such as how the Vikings would put their dead on ships and light them on fire so they could burn away at sea in the ultimate display of glory. He said he wanted something like that, despite not being a flashy person in the slightest. Or to be buried underneath a tree in a spot with a good view.

However many canned phrases and saccharine expressions of sympathy later (guy, we know you're paid to do this—ain't no way you could care about every person's death here), we reach the part where we're invited to come up and speak any words "we may wish to extend as gratitude 🤲👋🤝 or to reminisce about 😿📝 our dearly departed."

One of Pawpaw's cousins I've never met goes up and talks about growing up in Medicine Hat together. He shares stories about midsummer fishing trips, first girlfriends, a mutual friend named Gordo (🧐).

A work friend, Chalmers, remembers him for his steadiness and dependability. Chalmers goes into detail about what Pawpaw was like around the workplace. He brings up how they'd chat at lunch every day, and more often than not find time to go for drinks the bar after work. Tells a funny anecdote about the time Pawpaw bought a lottery ticket and won $20 and decided to never buy another one so he could quit while he was ahead.

Annie, another of Pawpaw's cousins, wishes she could have spent more time with Pawpaw in recent years. He may have been the strong, silent type, but she liked his company and found him to be "a trustworthy confidant when times got rough," such as when her first son, Jeremy, was struck and killed by a drunk driver when he was eight years old. Pawpaw had helped her through the loss.

"Who would like to grace us with their words of kindness next?" Person Handling Proceedings asks.

A small stirring.

Nana turns around from the pew in front of ours. "Would you like to say a few words, Savoy, seeing as how we likely won't be seeing you again any time soon?"[138]

"Eiiguhhh...I didn't write a speech—"

"Your dear Pawpaw is only going to pass once."

"No, I—No speech. I can't—" Worst-case scenario, worst-case scenario.

"Gethup they you an futhining talth abou yoh *Pahpah!"*

"Okay, Mom." (I am defeated once again.)

Jittery, jaundiced (spiritually, if not physically), I shuffle toward the lectern to the side of the boxed version of Pawpaw and pick up the mic from the podium.

How is one *not* supposed to dissociate when they see someone packaged up like that? What do you say about a *box person* who used to be a hands-and-feet person, who could smile? Freeze you some yogurt tubes if you did your homework? Sit quietly with you and watch *The Price Is Right* on Sunday mornings as you sip apple juice from a *Toy Story 2* mug? Patch you up when you climb the oak tree out back with Wally and fall from a branch while acting like a monkey for laughs? Try to cut your unwieldy afro the way it's supposed to be cut and then give up after an hour and start using elastic bands to move it around so it looks like it's been cut and you can feel like you have a new hairstyle that'll give you one more shot at making friends during your next school day? What do you say?

"Don't start crying before you start speaking," Nana says. "We won't be able to *hear* you, dear."

Individual Tasked With Facilitation provides me with a scratchy tissue—hotel-tier Swan brand.

Oh, everyone looks so disconsolate and expectant, arranged into neat little rows in this church-style hall. And here I am, hands on the wooden lectern, breathing in the warm saliva particles still on the mic, trying to dredge up the best memories I have of someone who is distant but 25% me. Dry, liquid, tugging at my dress, I start:

> "H-Hi, everyone. I've been—I've been asked to say a few words about Pawpaw, so...here I am. Mmm...I haven't prepared a speech. This might

[138] I love Pawpaw, but noooooo. Not like this—not without something prepared.

> not very good, but...[139] But Pawpaw, as I knew him, was—he was a good person. I didn't get to learn as much about him as I would have liked, but the time I spent with him, it was nice. He, uhh, he really liked ice cream[140]—he really liked his ice cream, and he'd buy big plastic tubs of Neapolitan. He'd be the one to eat the strawberry because Wally and I would always eat around it. He taught me how to swirl it so that it became ice cream soup. And sometimes, if we were eating it outside, it'd melt too fast, so he'd re-freeze it for us, or we'd pour it out for the ants and watch them eat it. The ants really liked it. They couldn't stop eating it! Uhh...So, we'd do that a lot, or we'd go to the Dairy Queen down the street and get a Skor Blizzard™ there if Wally and I" (Wally is clapping—bless his soul) "had been really good and eaten all our veggies for a week. We'd go down there, and I'd order the Dilly Bar™ for Wally, and we'd put nickels in the donation toy where the coin would be sent down an elaborate track—a funhouse slide for coins—and we'd go up and get our ice cream, and we'd sit on the outdoor patio, uhhh, and, eiughh—"

"Thank you, Savoy, for that wonderful meditation on *ice cream*," Nana cuts in. "Shall I take things from here?"

She makes her way from her pew to the podium.

I mumble "sure" into the mic and place it on the podium before returning to my seat.

"I could go fah sum ice crim right nah," Winston says to me, nodding again.

Mom practically has her purse turned inside out on the pew. Guess she's looking for something other than a finger sandwich. Whatever.

Nana takes to the front and clears her throat loudly enough so Janice can hear. She looks hale set against the backdrop of banners and organs and decorative Jesus iconography, prim and proper in her Sunday best.

She begins: "So to bring things back from the *culinary* end of things—I'd like to say a few words about my late husband, if I may—assuming no one else wishes to speak?" (Janice makes a noise that goes ignored.) "Very well. Denys and I had our rocky moments—that's what marriage is—a series of highs, lows—they can't all be sunny days—and yet, we understood each

[139] Winston is already checked out, bobbing his head up and down, as if listening to a Bob Marley song in his head; Janice is rifling around in her purse for something, while eating one of the finger sandwiches she smuggled in.

[140] Another Biden/Trump *ménage-à-froide* drawing flashback.

other in a way that all good marriages allow. We first met in my sophomore year." (Janice is dropping things on the floor now.) "He was a senior—he'd newly moved to town from Medicine Hat. I saw him parking his beloved '52 Chevy,[141] and I thought to myself, '*Who* is that mustachioed man with the nice truck?' You could say I was more interested in the truck. We spoke for the first time at a football game. Gabby, my good friend who's here today, and I were on the cheerleading squad, and Denys had just made the varsity team. The position names—they forever defy me—but I think he was a..." (someone shouts, "running back!") "That's it—he was a 'running back.' He scored a touchdown right before we were to do our halftime routine, and he came up to us girls on the sideline and jumped—just *jumped*—high in the air. Like a gazelle. I still don't know *what* he was trying to accomplish with that" (more laughter) "but when he came down, he winked at me. There was something in that wink that told me he might be more than a shiny truck and a good jumper. Not long after—"

"Ith thath why he touthed me?" Janice says, finding what she was looking for.

"Get a hold of yourself, Janice. Now's not the time for that."

"Becauth *Dad* watha thuperthar foothbawl playerl? Geth all the wadieth?"

"Are you under the influence again? What is this?"

"Yew know he did, thoo. I thold you. I thold everlyone. And you didn'th listhen!"

(Lots of nervous muttering from the other pews. Winston is still jammin', mon.)

"Stop this instant, Janice. We're here to *honour* your father, not drag his name through the mud."

"I wan evewrlyone thu know thath Denyth, my dad, touthed me when I wath a girl. I thtiwl have the pwoof! Ith righ here! You thrlied thu geth rid of ith!"

She's holding a tattered piece of paper up in the air—a notebook page.

"Thavi! Rea thith for evewrlyone! Thee wha kinna man ee wath!"

(Oh no 😞)

[141] This sparks a series of light laughs from the pews. Pawpaw must've had a real love for that car.

"Do ith, you good-fo-nothin thraithor bith! Abandon youl own motheh."

She thrusts the page at me. It's pointless to resist. The page contains a diary entry, from when Mom—from when *Janice*—could write legibly. Her letters are wide and curly. It's dated December 16th, 1978. She would have just turned seven.

I read it without alteration, a clerk in the family court of psychosis:

> *Dear diary,*
>
> *Momma went out tonite with her friends to the movie. It was Me and Reggie and Daddy, we had mac and chese for suppr and it was good. I had kechup on mine and Reggie ate two bowls. We watched Little house on the prare while daddy naped in his chair. Reggie stole a candy from the drayer in moms and dads bedroom. I told him not to but he did. He did'nt share with me, I was so mad. Then we had to take a bath before mom got home Dad said. Reggie did'nt want to take one he cried and yeled so Dad said you can be filth then and Reggie falled asleep on the couch. Dad did the bath time and I got to use the bubbble bath water melon. We listned to the radio my favoright song came on! and When I said done Daddy didn't dry me off he got in the tub and said I want to take a bath too the water was really cold. So he put it on again. my fingers looked gross and wringly. His sope smelled bad and he made me wash his hairy back, I've never seen daddy naked. He showed me his body it was big. He has a penus. It was what Mommy liked. I could touch it but not tell mommy I did. He said I did'nt have one becuase I was a girl girls have something else with a v. Things can go in it they don't come out like this. The water got really cold so we got out and he told me Mommy does'nt like baths do'nt take one with Mommy. He gave me ice creme. But when Mommy got home I askd her if she has a v thing and she made a face and got realy realy realy realy realy mad at me. I do'nt feel good, I'm hungry, I am gunna sleep.*
>
> *Good nite Diary. Love: Janey.*

...

(...)

"What are you trying to prove, Janice? You were a *child*. How are we supposed to trust a diary entry from a little *girl?* This is your *father*, my heaven's sake. It's his *funeral*. He wasn't perfect, but are you not going to let him rest?"

"Reth in heww maybe!"

"Dear Lord!"

Business-supplied Mediator, who had all but disappeared into the background there, steps in and requests that we take a breather.

They can't.

"Thith is whath happen with hith nephew, thoo. Unca Than tow me. Why ithn he here, huh?"

"Your father made a minor mistake with Danyl's son that was blown out of proportion. Their falling out was about more than that. Much more."

"Hey," I say. "I was molested by one of my four grade 4 teachers when I was a kid. You don't hear me complaining." (No one's listening. Winston's on the third track of *Exodus* in his messed up coconut mind.)

Now that I think about it, Janice's behaviour makes a lot more sense. She had hinted at this when I was younger but never elaborated. I'd also heard rumblings of family drama involving Pawpaw's brother, a lack of speaking terms because of a family trip that had taken place.

"Heth a rapith! Dirthy rapith! Ruin my life. Ruin Reh's, too! Rethie wouthinna died!"

"Enough, Janice! Enough! What happened to your brother had nothing to do with any of that—Reginald made his choices. He was ill, like you, and made a mistake that cost him his life. But we all know you had *plenty* of chances to turn your life around. You didn't. Don't take your failures out on your father."

Come to think of it, I stayed with Pawpaw and Nana for a bit when I was around seven. But I don't have a single memory of him doing anything inappropriate. I know he didn't want me at first, but...What was wrong with me? Was I too ugly for my (alleged) pedo grandfather? Janice was stunning before the goop, sure—like, beauty pageant material—so I suppose it makes sense.

Janice is writhing around beside me, flapping the diary entry about, repeating the words "thick man" over and over.

A lot of groaning and gesturing from the other side of the room. Calls for quiet. MC-inator is sweating breach-of-contract bullets. He makes one more attempt to cut in: "Perhaps a pause here to reflect upon the—"

"Look at yourself. Do you seriously expect me to take you seriously, Janice, on familial matters? *You*, who has driven away every positive influence in your life? You, who gave up your first two children?"

(... ... ...)

She pushes on: "Your father—rest his *soul*—wasn't like you. He never gave birth to not one but *two* crack-cocaine-addicted half-breed children and put them up for adoption." (When...? Was I...?) "It's no small miracle you kept the third" (Wait...But...? Full siblings...? Always wanted...) "But look what happened with Savoy—you had to give her to foster care because of your habits, and we had to clean up your mess after that so you could get her back. Then, you drove her away, too—one of my only grandchildren—while you strip-danced and *Lord* only knows what else!"

"You may me give them ap!"

"You were 18 for the first, you bloody fool! And you did it again right after with that drug dealer—*What-Was-His-Name*. Do you even remember? We had to give *that* one to a family in Detroit. I had to sign the documentation because you were too indisposed to do so!" (More half siblings...)

"Ah wanthed a keep him!"

"And what about Savoy's father? Where did you chase him off to before you shacked up with *this* one? Mercifully, he never gave you a child."

(*Savoy's father...Never gave you a*...Isn't he sitting right beside me? Dad, say something.)

Winston shrugs and unwraps a finger sandwich of his own from a napkin.

"Dad, what's Nana saying? What does she mean?"

"Doh let da lef hand know what da right hand is doin."

"What's that supposed to mean? Was I a crack baby? Do I have any full siblings? Do I have more half-siblings? Are you my real dad?"

"All crab find dey hole."

"Wha—?"

Nana cuts in: "I'm sorry you had to find out like this, Savoy, but clearly, Janice is more of a liar than you might've thought. I hated having to be complicit in yet *another* of her tortuous facades, so in a way, I'm glad it's

come out—though I'd rather've hoped it might've come out in a *different* way."

"Eh—So—Where did—"

"We'll speak later. Not now, dear."

"Why did it take you so long to rescue me from foster care?"

Master C is powerless in the face of deep-seated inter-generational trauma and crack-baby genealogical investigations.

Just as it seems like things are wrapping up and the Viking boat-turned-dumpster fire funeral ceremony is about to draw to a close so we can all go gorge ourselves on empty cucumber sandwich calories in the lobby and pretend like none of this happened, Janice starts up again.

Today, 2:24 PM

fortnite chug juggers 🍼🍼🍼

"You neva believe me! You thell that nurthes I wath a crliminal!"

kath

how's the funeral going? think you'll make it out tonight if we meet at the 104 dons?

"What *else* was I supposed to tell them? 'Oh, *yes*, the reason my daughter is so petite and *strung out* is because she's overworked! She's not doing illicit drugs with foreign men and criminals! She's a good girl!' Do you think they wouldn't have been able to tell?"

sigma savoy

ho boi

lol

"Thath wathenth yow dethicithion!"

so my dad isn't my dad apparently

"Someone had to make it for you. You were evidently in no shape to do it for yourself. You kept asking the nurses for morphine, but they couldn't give it to you because you had other drugs in your system! If you hadn't been to that hospital for drug-related concerns, and those mysterious bruises you received, the hospital wouldn't have had our contact information and wouldn't have been able to call us to help!"

and janice was molested by my grandpa when she was a kid

and grandpa also molested his brother's son before (after?) that

and i have half-siblings i've never met

and my nana and janice are screaming at each other in front of everyone... I've checked out

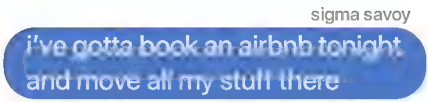
"Ee wath my thon!"

so as expected i guess

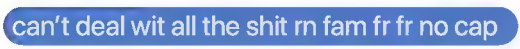
"Which one, Janice? Which one?! You had *two* sons! One was from the negro from the grocery store, and the other was from—well, you never even told us where!"

"Aughh!"

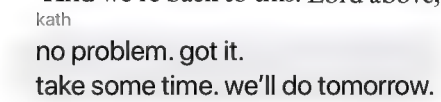
"See? That's all you can do—scream and cry and complain as soon as you're cornered. As soon as you're made to look at yourself. My, what an *embarrassment* you've become." *(To the other pews)* "I can't *begin* to describe how sorry I am for this, you all. This is the last thing I wanted for this ceremony."



"Rapith! Ee wath...Ee killed Reth! Reth killed eemself cauth of Denyth. Ee knew! Ee knew abouth dad'th ways! Knew ee wath a pedo. Ee got touthed too! Ee tol me!"



"And we're back to this. Lord above, how you *disappoint* me."



"Ee wath!"

"You should try to pay attention to the one child left in your life. You're in your 50s. *Why* can't you stay clean?"

"No thubsthanthes! No!"

"I know about the brownies, the 'edibles,' the magic mushrooms. It'll be *your* funeral I have to attend next."

"I neva need a ya help! I do juth fine! AAAAAAAHHHHHH!"

42

My taking some time consisted of leaving the ceremony right around when Janice was threatened with police intervention, grabbing my stuff from her barracks, buying a pack of John Players (because I wanted to feel real pain), and making my way to Strathcona to check into a shared Airbnb with an older couple and their very meow-y former street cat named Porky.

Smoked seven in a row on their deck until they politely warned me to stop for my health's sake.

43

Freaky Bobvery 😍😜🤮

Today, 2:47 PM

You make it?

Status update?

you don't wanna know

life has a funny way of kicking a cowboy when he's fallen off his saddle, lemme tell ya boy yes sir yes sir

That bad, eh?

❤️ i'll learn ya later

❤️ less jus say, partner, i'm glad i gots you

9:59 PM

I had an epiphany after smoking the fattest $tack of John Players and drinking the mini bottle of Jack I bought on the plane.

$ick.

It's a bit long, but you could use that as an album title if you wanted to. Or at least a lead track.

What was this revelation?

Might've been the headrush.

‼️ I wrote a poem on a napkin while I was out smoking on the deck

It wasn't an MLP-themed one, was it...?

Because I like you and all, but that might put even me in a situation.

On a serious note: That's great, Savoy.

Don't ever put me in a citation...

*situation

Did you turn autocorrect back on? I notice you're using proper capitalization as well.

I can still be [f r e a k y] if you need me to be.

I'm seeing a whole new Savoy.

Thank you Avery. It might take me a bit cuz i r stoopid.

But like I said, I think it's time I tried. Really tried.

I don't want to become my mom or dad or anyone else in my family. I can't. I won't let myself.

Can you send me the poem you wrote?

Onwy if you don't jwudge me

I'm jwust a bwug, a wittwe bitty bug girl. (I'm so fragiwe.) Pwease don't step on me.

[View photo next page]

80hd

& you
the glass
neon & you
might be the the
& I flower sign &
glass & neon the doordash guy
the city's cold & what
that's tough were you sayin
for wine right the other day
charged extra out w/ the girls n the
bill was too much thing happened mhm
yeah the purple hydrangeas leaking out onto
right pavement eddying & yearning
do will it
what the new rain again so
let it do many in hats today could
the new trend & be the new probably
stopped for coffee not & me
when when was
the last time
we?

You did this? Just now?

Yes 🥹🥹🥹

I didn't now what I wanted it to be at first. It came out all of a sudden. Then I thought it would be funny to make it an adhd poem to show what it's like to have extreme 80hd where you see everything around you in hyper detail but at the same time you like miss a lot of things that bore you. And to show what it's like to talk to insufferable normie bitches. That's how I sometimes see the world anyway. It's like I'm here but I'm not.

Wow. You picked this up quickly. Really.

Most people fiddle around with it for months, writing exceptionally generic stuff before they break through. This is a really cool first take.

You think so???

You aren't gonna step on my wittwe bug body???

Not at all. Your bug body gets to stay intact.

Arigato Avery-dono 🙇🏾‍♀️

I will do better next time.

Unrelated, kinda related, but you didn't end up telling me about overcoming resentment and what comes after. I tried to avoid making this poem resentful. I don't wanna be like the other shitty poets out there rubbing their poopoo and le racism stuff on the pages.

I'm not a poet but you know what I mean.

That's a huge topic. Are you sure you wanna get into it now? It sounds as if you've had a rough day. We can save it if you want.

NOOOO! I wanna talk to you papi 😍

😂

Why don't I call you and give you the full shpeal that way? I was working on the website all day and finally got everything uploaded, while doing gallery submissions at the same time, so I'm straight zoinked, dawg. And tell me about the funeral.

OKIE

I WANNA SEE THE WEBSITE

SMEND KINK

LINK

LOL

I WILL PROMOTE

averydbas.com

Wanted to do something wacky for the URL but figured I'd be sending this to galleries, so I didn't push it.

Thanks again for inspiring me to do this. I've gotta believe in my work and chart a new path. We're goin' all the way to the top, mf.

[Call]

[Call Ended: 5:01:04]

44

Feelings About Art Anonymous 2 hours 284934
>>284935 >>284937 >>284939 >>284949
>>284951 >>284958 >>284974 >>284988
>>284999 >>2845005 >>285006 >>285010
>>285011 >>285014 >>285019 >>285024
>>285025 >>285026 >>285027 >>285028
>>285030 >>285037 >>285038 >>285040
>>285044 >>285045 >>285047 >>285049
>>285050 >>285079 >>285081 >>285088

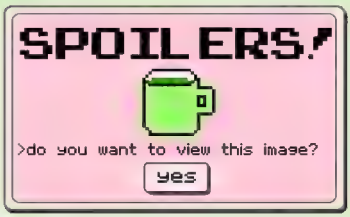
How do you feel about contemporary art? I hate it. I went to an exhibit in my city, and it was nothing but anti-white nonsense from a bunch of unskilled poets. (I posted about the date I went on there before.) The boy (A—he's one of the good ones) I've been getting close with lately is so much more talented than the people in that exhibit (Pic related. I snuck a picture of one of the pieces at his workshop) but he only gets into small galleries and never gets the opportunities he deserves. I'm an artist myself (I do lots of commission based work), and it just seems like things are getting harder out there for artists. I never thought I'd have another boyfriend in my life; I thought I was going to have to fake being

asexual like the inert moids I always encounter. I thot my life was over and was starting to rot completely, but he saved me, and now I wanna help him in any way I can. So here's some of his work. You don't have to buy it obvs (he doesn't care about the money; he's more than that) but any kind of feedback or sharing with art friends would be great. Maybe advice on how serious artists like him can get opportunities without lowering themselvevs? (Sry for any spelling mistakes; I'm typing this on my tablet at the doctor's office.) (Plz no doxx.) 1/3

Anonymous 2 hours 284935 >>284937 >>284955 >>285099

>>284934 (You)
2/3 :3

Anonymous 2 hours 284937 >>285029 >>285098



>>284934 (You)
3/3 he's so talented >:333

Anonymous 4 hours 284939

>>284934 (You)
Did you come on here to shill your boyfriends shitty art? Why?

Anonymous 4 hours 284945

I like some contemporary art, but it's too sexual and it looks like it smells. Don't know why. Just think if he made it, nona. You'd have to pretend to like his work for the rest of your life because he'd get too butthurt if you criticized it. lol

Anonymous 3 hours 284949

>>284934 (You)
mid

Anonymous 3 hours 284951

>>284934 (You)
I'm in art school right now. fuck you.

Anonymous 3 hours 284955

>>284935 (You)
The angel one is really fucking cool! What did he use to string the angels up in sequence? Fish wire? Is that a frame he built around it? Nifty.

Anonymous 3 hours 284958

>>284934 (You)
Some of the nonas on here are gonna be mad about his, but I'm glad you have someone in your life. I date girls. I've had one boyfriend before, and he was sweet. I wasn't attracted to him, but I wish him well. He lives in Ohio now and rizzes gyatts no cap ong.

Anonymous 3 hours 284960 >>284966

IS THIS YOUR VICTORY LAP WHY DO YOU KEEP POSTING THIS STUFF I DONT WANT TO HEAR ABOUT ANY MORE OF YOUR DATES STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP

Anonymous 3 hours 284966

>>284966
The half-moid tranny with the white guy fetish? Did she try to change her writing style to avoid detection?

Anonymous 3 hours 284967 >>284968 >>284975 >>284978 >>284979

>averydbas.com
Reverse-searched the pics. Is this his website? I just reported him to the FBI :)

Anonymous 3 hours 284968

>>284967
lmao i just reported him to roblox

Anonymous 3 hours 284972

>Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man rapes what he sows.

Anonymous 3 hours 284974

>>284934 (You)
Your sparkling new boyfriend creates a website, and your first thought is to promote his work here? Are you fucking acoustic, like actually?

45

Dr. Dingleberry

Forgot people still waited in line at doctor's offices. I thought we'd gone back to the pioneer days in Canada where they reverted to treating all ailments with bedrest, cocaine, or grease. Or digitized it to the point of 5G-beaming prescriptions straight into patients' bloodstreams. As it would turn out, you *can* still see a live doctor—oily skin, sunspots, paisley ascot and all—in 2024!

While I waited, I finished that Pickle Rick dead meme commission, started on another of the NELK Boys being cross-examined at the Nuremberg Trials, and launched my Turbo-Helpful Ultra-Cwayzy Website Promotion campaign to get Avery some exposure. I came up with interview questions we could use for a YouTube video where I chat him up and salivate all over him; thought up a TikTok series where he could feature a new piece every week and go into detail about how each was made; created a new Instagram to feature our work together—his stuff for the most part, but maybe one or two of my poems with artwork down the line (😏😏😏); researched smaller galleries in Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, Ottawa that might want his work.

Without making eye contact, Doc asked how I was doing. Told him about the art campaign, which flummoxed him. Asked him if, in principle, a hairy, androgen-filled woman of my make and model, with a propensity for gaining muscle and having life-altering cramps whenever she gets her period, wanted to, on *Minecraft*, get her IUD removed and try to have someone's child, would she be able to? Could she hazard a dream like that and possibly, *hypothetically*, make herself the happiest girl in the world by getting rawed?

He didn't understand what I was asking and chattered on about bloodwork, so I dropped it. I'll rip it out myself.

The jist: Got the paperwork. Proof I'm fucked, been fucked a while. (Cost me $250 bones!) I'm goin' back to school, baby.

And now, we wait for SigmaxSavoy's Big Backyard Bonanza to unfold. Just gotta survive a few more days, hang out with my friends, and then return to my buh-buh-boyfriend to help him take over the art world. And then life's sorted. All this shit with my fam goes away. A ha ha! We out here 🤙🏾.

46

fortnite chug juggers 🍼🍼🍼
Today, 12:34 PM
sigma savoy
We should go see if the 1-armed pushup guy is still on Whyte Ave.
kath
i saw a guy give him $50 to have him do a hundred on the spot the other day.
sigma savoy
Jerrod Harbinger
Time?
3:14 PM
sigma savoy
Should be free by 4:00.
Done at doc's.
5:00 to be safe?
Ahhh I can't wait!
I think I spotted Matthew driving down Gateway in his Camaro.
I don't care. I'm gonna see my fwiends!

47
Saged and Reported

Oh, what timorous beating doth my heart fulfill?
What fancy, what folly, doth a love instill?

The air is crisp, so crisp. I see the bus stop, bathed in bird poop.

My phone starts blowing up as I near the bus loop.

Instagram and texts.

Avery. Sexts?

Savoy, what did you do?...

Why are these people flooding my accounts, who?...

They're saying I assaulted you at Riverside...Reported me to police??? FBI??? Roblox???

Calling my work???...Aman texted...Fired.

Non-stop DMing...Sister and husband...Doxxed.

Know about all our dates? Stalking...Exposing...internet...the whole time?

Forgave...other faults...believed in you...this?

Love...but...

Break...Need time...Staying offline...

48

Wait. Please don't go.

49

[ ]

"I don't know—she fell all of a sudden. Just—*plop*."

"Should we call an ambulance?"

"Might be best—to be safe."

"I don't have a phone on me."

"You can use mine. Actually, I'll do it. You should sit by her in case she wakes."

"Got it."

♀

"You'll be fine. We're getting you some help now."

"No...amb'lance, massa...Cobb salad...Be fine."

"Does your head hurt? Did you hit your head?" (*Away*) "Hey, yeah, she might've hit her head when she fell."

"I...just...retarded..."

"Try not to move around. Lie back. We're on the pavement. Lie back—we're getting you help."

"No...salad...scrape off...road..."

50

fortnite chug juggers 🍼 🍼 🍼

Today, 4:24 PM

Jerrod Harbinger
Picking up Kath. Be there around 5:00.

4:54 PM

kath
we just rolled up. there's a fight taking place in the drive-thru. if you get here fast enough, you might be able to catch it. it might turn into one of those ufc scraps you used to make us watch where they just saw red and swung.

5:21 PM

kath
you good?

5:54 PM

[3 missed group chat calls]

kath
sav. where are you???

6:28 PM

kath
so much for that plan. give us some warning if you're gonna bail like this again. we'd understand.

if you don't call back right now, we're heading out.

[1 missed group chat call]

you had us going there, savoy. see ya around.

Jerrod Harbinger left the chat

8:27 PM

sigma savoy

YOU GUYS

I'M SO SORRY

i FAINTED COMING OUT OF THE DOCTORS

Was on my way to meet up and

Fuck

Avery got doxxed and now he's

Not messaging me or picking up my calls

I feel like Matthew; I've called him a million times but he won't pick up

And I got so overwhelmed I fainted

Bystanders had to help me out. They called the paramedics and the paramedics wanted me to

Get in the ambulance because they thought I had a head injury

So I told them I was just low IQ and like that and I had to argue with them for like 3 hours outside of the doctor's office and everyone was looking at me and I finally convinced them I was fine

I was getting all these messages and commencement my IG from random girls from and stuff so I had to go private

Avery broke up with me I'm

Fucked. I'm so so so so so sorry I

Wanted to see you guys so bad

I'm just FUCK

grjskgla ghaghjks chomp jghkdsjghkdsj jacked hgjsk hgjksghdjskhgk ghoul djshgjdskhgks

I can't eat anything.

I left my Airbnb early so we could stay out all night. I keep thinking about Linkin Park Lyrics. I'm so close to the edge. I don't know if it's over over, or what's been going on with him, we were doing so well

I was just trying to help and and

I've ruined everything

Do you still want to meet tonight? I can still come out I don't have to be at the airport until 8:00 am. I'm my the Don's now

[2 missed group chat calls]

8:59 PM

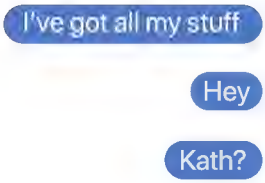
sigma savoy

I'm at the Don's.

Kath.

Jerrod's IG isn't working.

I'm at the Don's.



51

Sometimes you *do* cry yourself to sleep in the disability stall of a VIP section washroom at an Edmonton airport because it reminds you of the boyfriend you had for 72 hours, and rest there until security wakes you up from your dex nap and tells you to leave.

52

Threw up the Chubby burger I ate on the plane ride back.

Burnt is not a good movie.

53

Don't make it to room when get back to apartment.

Sleep on couch one full day.

54

No messages from Avery.

55

Room.

"Room."—Room

Room.

Room.

Room.

56

Seeing Red

Go.

Room.

Plants.

Dying.

Veenie.

Joe.

Rogan.

Sad.

No.

Terrarium.

Sisyphuses?

1.

2.

3?

Where?

Step.

On.

Something...?

SomeTHING!

HIM!

(Shoulder-check door, full blast.)

(Fuck. It. Flood. Gates.

Open.)

"DAX!"

"Oh, shit. Wha's up, vro? Uhh, I got company...This is, uhh, Rosaline."

(BITCH sitting on his bed. Holding McDelivery bag.)

"WHERE?!"

"Hi, I'm Rosaline. I got to SFUBC with Dax. He said you also—"

"WHERE?!!?!"

"Hah?"

"SLUGS! SISPYHUSES?!"

"Oh...uhh, vro, so, they, uh..."

"WHAT?"

"They, uhh...like, eiuughhh..."

"Oh, was that the accident you mentioned?"

"Accident?"

"Like, so...when I was..."

"Fucking OUT with it, you *mealy-mouthed*—ARGH!"

"They deaded, vro. Yesterday."

"HOw—AAaAH—GOD——FUCK—How did it happen?
—How?—*How?"*

"Euighh...Vro, I was trynna put some more moss in, like you asked, but, uhhh, like, they ate the other stuff and the bowl stuff, so I went in the backyard like you asked and grabbed a hunk a moss, an, like, wenna came back in and put it in, an, like, when I wenna put it around the tank, one of em got on my hand an vro, I jusss panicked, so I moved my hand away n it caught the latch n the glass thing they were in fell. I, uhh, tried to clean it up buh the glass was everywhere n the slugs fell it in n looked hurt n I stepped in some of the, like, glass while I was cleaning up and fell, too, n I think I, uhhh, I, eiiguuh..., like, think I fell on em."

"*Fell*. You *fell*—on my—sl-u-gs???"

"Vro, look at my big toe. I had to pull glass out—"

"I don't wanna look at your FUCKING fat, disgusting
toe, you sick, ARAAAAGH, sick, FAT, fucking PIG. YOU KILLED—
MY SLUGS. You SWINE!"

"Can't we get you new ones? We can look in the backyar—"

"NO, we CAN'T just—GET *<u>new</u> ones*, you moron. You fu—
AAHHH—fuck—you fucking... [redacted]."

"Hey, it's not okay to use a slur like—"

"I will have you duct-taped, abducted, and tortured in
a shipping container until you bleed from your eyes if
you say another word, Rosaline. I swear it on my life.

Do not test me. FUCKING Anise Stanley-Guo tapes—
on repeat—for the REST of time. I PROMISE you."

"What the...?"

"Vro, the hell?"

"*WHAT* did you do with THEM?!"

"Eiughhg...I..."

(Black garbage bag in corner of room; broom and dustpan)

"You didn't...You daft motherfucker, you didn't—tell me right
now..."

"Well, I had to sweep up the glass an the bodies 'cause I thought
you, uhhh, like, uhh, might, not like to see the, uhh..."

"*MIIIIGHT not want TO SEE* the glass I just stepped in,
and the wet patches where they BLED to DEATH?!"
"Is that them? In the BAG—RIGHT *THERE*?"

"Oh, uhh...yuh..."

"If I had a gun right now, a rock, a fucking leg of lamb,
I would kill you with it where you sit and probably put it
on your abandoned YouTube channel, you HORRIBLE,
SICK, fucking—morbidly obese—you, fucking—*scrote*—
gave you—a chance—fucking!!!"

"I can get rid of the bag."

"Shut the fuck up right now, Rosaline.
I *will* filet you and sell your body parts
to the *lowest* bidder on the Vietnamese
black market! TRY ME."[142]

"Vro..."

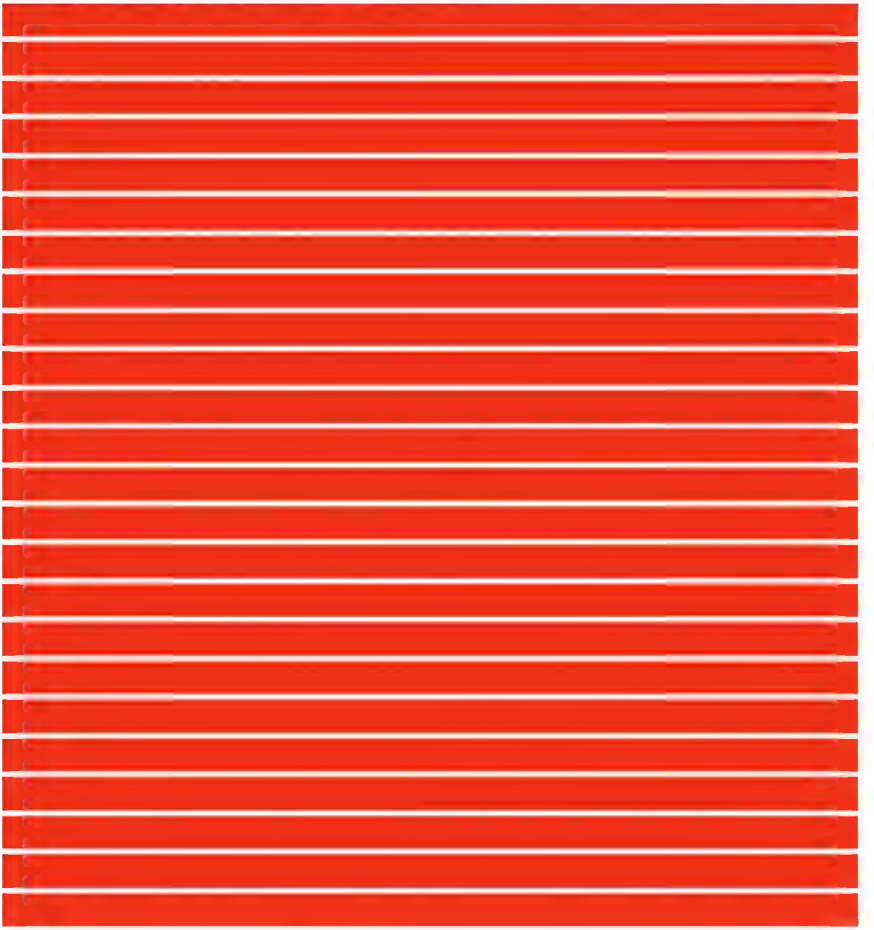
"This is it. Ha ha! Ha! This is IT! Oh ho! This—right
here—this is where Savoy draws the LI*EEE*NE! Sick—
ARGH—SICK, sick!"

---

[142] I'll FUCKING do it.

"Hey, I had a shift yesterday, uhhh, and they fuckin, like—I was super late, so I had to book it, an I was gonna take it out n then, like, but—they fired me. I don't work at DF's anymore. Yngali got busted for selling drugs, n, like, she fuckin told them I was in on it or somethin cuz I guess she was mad I didn't buy some from her, so she, uhhh, fuckiiiiin told them I was buying or selling I guess—so they fired me, n then I started to feel depressed, so I haven't really done much the day or two, so...It's hard, m*A*an..."

"THAT'S IT!——!!"



57

"Where's the computer sauce? Where's the computer sauce?!"
—Gordon Ramsay

This one isn't just for the pros! You, too, can destroy your slovenly roommate's noisy gaming PC. It's easy as pie to make happen!

Here's what you'll need (or not need):

- One (1) gaming CPU
- One (1) bottle of about-to-expire whole Avalon milk (at least 250 ML)
- An inviolable fury that would turn most to Hadean soot if they tried to possess it
- Niggie monkey-grip hands
- Zero (0) fucks and/or inhibitions

Start by removing the cap to the bottle and pour the bottle into the cute ventilation holes on the top and side of the CPU.

Some of the chunks of the cream (natural settlement) from the milk may not make it through, but if you apply a bit of gentle pressure with your thumbs, they can be slotted in. That way, they can mingle with the hard drive and noticeably bring out the flavour (smoke)!

Now, your grubby, *molluscicidal* roommate may suggest you stop doing this, but go ahead and disregard any of his pitiable protestations regarding homework files and unpublished videos (they're all egregious anyway). Keep going until the full bottle and the chunks have worked their way down to the bottom of the machine. Save some to coat the attached keyboard, mouse, and any nearby Turtle Beach headphones.

Next, after unplugging any attachments, pick up the CPU and shake vigorously. Make sure you have a good grip on the machine; otherwise, it may slip out of your hands during this step and fall against the drywall, leaving a large hole under the corkboard of your roommate's Polaroids, one of which you're in. This may prompt you to try to eat that Polaroid of you pretending to eat the camera (thus, completing the cycle!) in front of him and then start to choke.

Once you've (re-)gripped and shaken the CPU so that the liquid coats every mechanical part inside the unit, set it down on the floor or a nearby bed, currently occupied by said roommate's latest romantic partner, whom you suspect is 15 years old and Thai and maybe a boy underneath her—would you look at that—Aritzia crop top. *Another one.*

Following this, you may hear shrieks of terror or more forms of ignorable pleas—this time, from the Thai ladyboy-in-the-making. If you yell loudly enough and threaten to castrate him/her with an asbestos-fueled blowtorch (you still have asbestos on the brain because if you're making this recipe you've lost the love of your life and less than a week ago you were consummating your love amidst asbestos), they'll stop! That will allow you all the time needed to smash the light-up keyboard. Remember to score the back of the keyboard first by attempting to break it over your knee. This will weaken the foundations of the keyboard and make breaking it over the side of the CPU much easier. Save any keys you don't throw around the room for a fun midnight snack later on!

At this point, you'll want to start cleaning up. You've done your duty! Toss the mouse against the ceiling so that it ricochets and lands on the plastic bag encasing your beloved dead slugs (if you have those). Find the cap of the milk jug and make sure to firmly affix it to the bottle. Vomit *dolcemente* (for the tenth time in the last few weeks) on the floor out of sheer frustration, go to the clogged, dish-riddled sink your roommate, who's now swearing a lot (it's almost like he *doesn't* want you to destroy his gaming PC!), didn't clean while you were gone, and wash out the bottle for recycling. Once you've done that, sit back and relax!

58

My Darlings, the Sisyphuses

Amid the declination of the season's cherry blossoms, I held a funeral for the Sisyphuses in Mr. Chang's backyard.[143]

I was the only one in attendance. (Dax wasn't invited; Avery didn't answer.)

[143] We aren't allowed pets, so when I brought up the idea of digging a small hole in the backyard, he kept asking "Why-ee yoou wan do that? Why-ee yoou wan do that?" and I told him it was something black people did as a part of ancestral voodoo magic to honour our spirits because we're all backwards savages, right? 🏚️🪨🐵 And he squinted really hard before telling me not to dig more than a square foot in the far-left corner.

The ceremony was somber, a great deal less eventful than Pawpaw's.

I read them Cioran quotes ("Melancholy: an appetite no misery satisfies." "Tears do not burn except in solitude." "We do not rush toward death, we flee the catastrophe of birth, survivors struggling to forget it."), Camus quotes ("There is but one freedom, to put oneself right with death," etc.), and the lyrics to Radiohead's "Last Flowers."

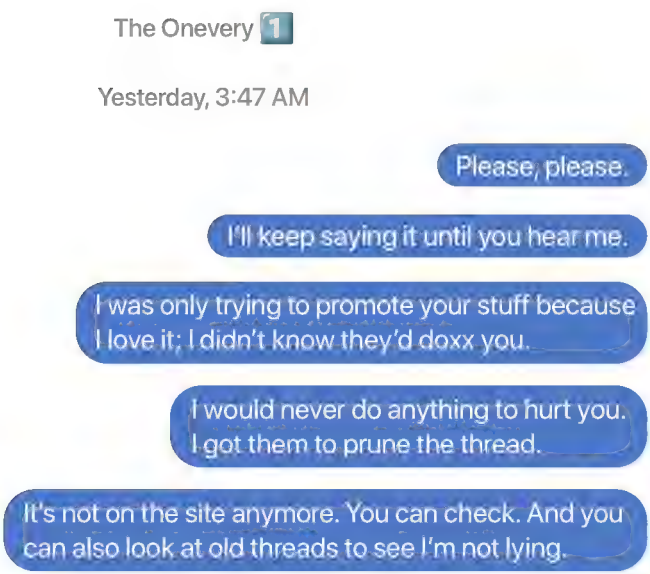
For music, I used my phone to play Richard Cheese's rendition of Alice In Chains' "Man in the Box," Soulja Boy's "Tell 'Em," and Sinatra's "Send in the Clowns."

Part of me was expecting them to come back to life and start wriggling about, slinking around as they used to, like how they were when I found them on the train tracks.

I buried them in the nicest box I could find, a Victorian lock-and-key jewelry box embossed with decorative roses. I turned the key into a necklace.

On a miniature stake I drove through the soil, I wrote "The Sisyphuses were happy."

59


The Onevery 1️⃣
Yesterday, 3:47 AM
Please, please.
I'll keep saying it until you hear me.
I was only trying to promote your stuff because I love it; I didn't know they'd doxx you.
I would never do anything to hurt you. I got them to prune the thread.
It's not on the site anymore. You can check. And you can also look at old threads to see I'm not lying.

I haven't been on the website sing. I'm never going back.

I'm sure you have but tell your family to set all they're

*Their accounts to private. It'll die down very soon. I know it.

Please.

[9 missed calls]

Today, 8:47 AM

Savoy, you clearly didn't understand what I meant when I said I needed some time to myself to think.

There are very few things in this life I take issue with anymore — life's generally too short to mind the petty or the temporary. But I do care about my family — more than I care about myself or my art. Doxxing me does nothing; I set my accounts to private or ignore it until it blows over. I can take jokes, criticism. I can find another part-time job. But when you have people going through my sister's life, reporting her to her workplace, calling my dad non-stop about raising a rapist and telling him to kill himself and me, tagging my mom in gore videos online, I find it hard to ignore. I've explained the situation to them. I didn't blame you — I said it was a result of some vendettas from art school that got out of hand — they don't think it was your fault. You're not in any trouble.
But they don't get internet culture the same way you and I might, so they're upset right now. I get that that's the price of admission with edgier online communities. They don't. I can forgive all of that. I truly can. But what I'm struggling to forgive are the accusations. Those anons knew a lot about our relationship — things I haven't told anyone. With how thoroughly they described things at times, I can only imagine you were posting about our dates and sharing my personal details online. Were you responding in the threads and adding play-by-plays? One girl told me that she was going to put me in a handicap chair and wheel me around until I went senile. That must've been a

reference to the furniture we saw on our first date.
How many threads have you made about us since I've known you? Since before that? I get that you have your life and your hobbies. I'd be a hypocrite to call you out for hanging out on those kinds of sites with the things I used to do online, but I don't really feel like wading through that website to try to go through everything you said about me.
I'm going to have to sit with this awhile. Being accused of assaulting you, of bringing you harm, is about the only thing that could have hurt me, and it has. Not to mention the stalking claims. Were you following me before we got together, too? Please say you weren't. They told me you have a history of hating men and doxxing people and that you're secretly faking this.
Maybe they were fucking with me.
I told you I was falling in love with you. I meant it.
Was I wrong to think you were different?
Let me be. I'll reach out.

I CAN

Send you the links to old threads

I can show you they're lying. Just gimme

Two sex

Secs

Not right now. 🥲

https://crystal.cafe/feels/res/5881075157932.html#241333

https://crystal.cafe/feels/res/5881079154980.html#284934

There are a lot of threads

I'll find the other ones

Some might've gotten pruned.

[2 missed calls]

60

Lalalalala! I Can't Hear You!

Haven't slept since hearing from Avery.

Nana tried calling. Didn't pick up.

Thought Dax would move out or at least have the decency to leave for a bit, but he hasn't. Can hear him playing his Switch.[144] Been spending most of my time outside to avoid him, not that he comes out of his room often enough to encounter me. Would try to impale him.

Think he called his mom to ask for money for a new PC. Couldn't hear too well through the door. Did hear something bizarre about touch-starvation??? *Him*??? Depression???

Out of liquid melatonin. Might try shrooms. Hear those can help. Slow-wave activity (*SWA*).[145] Won't take trazodone/Big Pharma mind-mushing sleeping pills. Gonna try to sleep outside tonight by PoMo Inlet.

Outside sleep = good sleep.

Hope Rosaline's dead.

/diarypost.

[144] *Bing! Bing! Wahoo! My wife's boyfriend just bought me* Super Mario Odyssey! *Yipee!*

[145] I'll slow-wave your activity, punk. Yeeeow!

61
Poem Me Write

Stil no slee

Wrote more poems at inlet on rock by...bridge far end near rec centre/er near crows attempt to psychokinetically/pathically communicate with Aevery. Thought might feel he tether something make clue in

Came pouring out a me so hard like fat uppercutta chest ugh couldn sto thesau rus

Start ed strong lose eyes *brain* clarity yeanow big tried to read gramher... *learn*

awake = asleep

asleep = awake

awake awake = awake

asleep asleep = ass sleep

h ere:

A murky, elided moon

The heron and I locked

In an Eternally Recurrent chain

Of mind scratches and eye licks

What I think is a

Westerly Wind

(the fan)

Carries ill portents

And deposits them nicely, in waves

At the edge of the bed

You will not rest, it soughs

Oh? So what?

You will curse the forces that keep you
Like this

Mhm.

I'm not lying to you!

I know.

Do your breathing exercises or else suffer
A most ruinous fate.

[You will wake up with both minds shriveled]

*

owl

An owl [raven-(crow)] hits the glass of the library window
Stuns itself to divination
And stares [at me, the homo sapien on the bench]
We're compatriots now
Fellow bandits in a league of villains

Running up against the barriers
Of an ever-thickening womb.

*

sigmaboi (me)

Sigma sadboi grindset villain king,
why do you look so troubled?

I watch you swimming the inlet at night,
making friends with the moonlight

they speak about you in town,
say mean, nebulous things

about the one who loves ritual self-drowning,
the one who appears at the oddest hours, dressed in black and blue

and stares at the gentle undulations,
sometimes masturbates, and wades

into the briny waters and swims
40 strokes before floating

there, just floating, floating,
then dunking his head underwater, holding,

holding, until the pain becomes cellular and
emergent, and up he rises again,

fractional as the crescent moon,
half self, half other

I see you, sadboi hustler king,
perform these existential ablutions

and pray you find these waters
warm

*

Untitled (Our Future Abroad)

Diurnal rephernal aphoristic and
dare. Cosbidian quotidian equanimical
enflamed. Stars crinkle and coruscate,
waltz clear through the interstices of day.
Carchunoprimo distillo quardiari, avio
Massimo. Andulfari andaparti serpentio's
tail. Catch the diaphanon, being the
transfer. Knowledge, balance, love, taste,
intuition, Portofino, flail Terpsichorean
whips and wind through the catacombs
of cortisol dreams!!!

62

Super-chatted qt3.15 $50 to tell her to "rush rope + chair build" for starting an OF and betraying her long-time fans. Banned. Spookid!

Sent a customer who commissioned a photorealistic illustration of Livvy Dunne as photorealistic a drawing of a penis with Peyronie's disease as I could manage. Closed my commissions.

63

Still the Onevery

Today, 4:14 AM

I know you donut wanna hear from me right now, but I wanna push through this with you.

Don't*

I finally slept so I can type again.

You're so incredibly, unbelievably special to me.

The way your eyes sparkle when you talk about things you're interested in, the passion you show for the people in your life and the things you care about, the compassion you have for people.

I can't stop looking at the photos we took together.

The photos we took in Fort Langley of the informative plaques.

You're so handsome it makes my heart want to explode into a million pieces.

[1 missed call]

Avery

8:12 AM

I wrote a few poems for you. Couldn't sleep.

Found a few more of yours online. (Not in a stalker way!)

I can't even begin
to describe what they did to me.
I've been good. Haven't been on CC
once since we spoke or since that day.

I hope things have calmed down for you.

Please tell me you're okay; that's all I want to know.

11:21 AM

Savoy, stop. What did I tell you?

And don't, under any circumstances,
show up at my apartment.

64

What Are You Gonna Do, Fire Me? I Thought This Was America!

Work. Still have work.

Shit day—weather, weathering. I'm wearing—???

One hour of sleep + massive cortisol rush keeps me conscious long enough to move legs to Cure.

Very late. (How late?)

"Holy," Maria says as I walk in. "Are you good?"

"You know me, playa."

Nod, nod, nod—head behind the counter and make myself a cup of the strongest blend we have—a gold roast from the depths of a volcano. (Don't know where.) "This one's on the house," I say to no one before taking a swig.

Gobble three sugar cubes without washing my hands.

"Have you seen Mr. C yet today?"

"Nope. He hasn't come in the last few days. He might've been waiting for you, his faaave employee."

"The fuck he is."

"Damn. Okay. You sure you're good, Savoy?"

"You ever try to sleep on a big rock by the water?"

"No?"

"You ever lose everything good in your miserable life, all at the same time and wanna torch anything remaining?"

"Not really...?"

"Ahhh. Can I have a croissant? I'm gonna have a croissant."

"You know Raphael doesn't like it when we eat the stock.[146] But if you do it quick, I can ring you u—"

"Don't mind if I do." (Pick the biggest, chocolate-iest chungo at the back with the most drizzle. Fo shizzle 🤑🥳 [I love rap now! I'm a gay R*dditor who hates her parents! Woah, Snoop Dogg! He coaches football. Martha Stewart! Woah! M-M-Muckbang!]) "Auuayemah!" *(Mouth full.)* "E-trathfur! *(Swallowing.)* I'll hit you up with that e-transfer later tonight, homie. Don't think a nigga forgot you." *(Chewing again.)* "Mah dwon een mwo mwhy myoh mworrie," I swallow again. "We can just *not* pay for this shit."

"Savoy, what's...?"

It's on, motherfuckers. I ain't workin' for piss today. No amount of time spent here will ever earn me what I want in life. We've been cheated out of too much by the likes of Raphael, the pseudo-lord class, the cursed Boomer/X/Early Millen holoparadigm. But not only me—every worker who's had to toil and grovel under the auspices of portly, graceless swines, sated phenomenological *wildebeests* watching on as we claw at the dirt, make meals out of mud. These creatures must learn not *that* their unending slights harm us so, stifle our self-actualization, but precisely *why* they do. Their workplace programming, their deterministic HR-ese, their draconian, anti-pneuma scheduling! It all must go. And this lesson must be taught in the only terms they comprehend (other than acid baths!)—the downtrodden's last stand! Let it be our revolution! And that other horse-cockery those Marxie dweebs were on about! It's time for a workers' coup ✊🏾✊🏾💢!

[146] Fuckin' guy, cheapskate bitch, won't even give us the day-olds *or* donate them to charity *or* let me give them to the cute rats out back.

"I mean, you're the one who's fucking him, right? At least *you* shouldn't have to pay for anything around here."

"Hey, that's not—"

"I don't know what you see in him. He's kinda fucking gross, tee-bee-que-aitch, fam. I wouldn't fuck with him *at all*, even if he was a $19 *Fortnite* card, ya feel me?"

"That's really mean. Sto—"

"I had a nightmare once that he asked me to stay after work to help him with those useless ads. Instead of getting me to type things for him, he took pictures of me against my will with his cracked Android that he won't ever replace because he's such a frugal bitchass. Does he fuck you in the back room there, with all the saran wrap and dusty plastic forks? Does he wait until all the customers go home then slowly unbuttons the fly of his fake Guess jeans and rub his *fat, wet, smegma-y* hogg in between your legs, maybe sniff your work-damp feet so he can get erect before he eases it into your young, nubile LatinXXX pussy? Does he push your head down into the *fake* avocado mush and frozen tikka masala—"

"Stop. That's not okay at all. What in the hell is wrong with you?"

"What, playa? A girl wants to know if her coworker's getting plowed by her—"

Speak of the smegma-growing, feet-snuffling devil! 👃🥵

"There's the *man* of the *hour*," I boon, looking him up and down. "Robespierre, secret enemy of the people. How's it goin', big hoss?"

He shuffles from the doorway up to the counter. "What iz zis? Why you-a eating croizzant right-a now?"

"Man, I'm just stackin' that bread. I'm just makin' existential G moves in silence. Lassssagna. *This is a cigar*—or something."

(I'm facing the back wall now, staring at the menu. Rise up, Cure staff! See me, meagre customers! Peep this sally into the Bastille!)

"I do not-a pay you to eat, Zavoy."

"But you *could*. Think about it—you *could* pay me to eat this croissant right now. Yet, you *choose* not to pay me to eat it. Why? We all have the freedom

of choice—every day, all day. Yet, we fritter away our time, construct fake limitations around ourselves—*oh, I can't cross the street right here; it's not allooooowed—oh, I have to pay my taxes so my country can donate that money to bureaucrats, warmongers, and child traffickers! I'll watch Savoy, my long-time employee, go broke and hungry because everyone must pay their dues in life and work for 50 years straight*—all for what? More plastic rectangles that have no tangible basis?"

"Zavoy, I'm-a going to have-a to—"

"And *since* you don't get paid fairly, that means you have to do baseless things, like peddle porn or, if you're pathetic, sleep with your putrid, tasteless *boss*, because you're just a *young girl* in this world of people who can't look beyond the plastic rectangles, and continue to adhere to their soulless drainpipe agenda of materialism and boomer-duty and *Latest Thing*® and Disney movies about gay, trans, black people, or if they're boomers, either ignore you or pretend to care about your plight and never do anything about it except for saying sorry because you come from nothing and won't ever *be* anything—and they can recommend all the frilly poems in the world to you to show you there are still things to care about out, to help you *feel* better about going to your rapist grandfather's funeral—spoiler: nothing makes death feel better, not even old-ass poems that can't even *begin* to deal with the wretched tangles of contemporary 'matrix' life—but everyone abandons you and mistreats you, and they don't really care, no matter how many things you read—and you *still* have to sleep with your boss or draw or sell foot pics or invent AI whores to have a $7000/month roof over your head! So maybe I will eat this croissant, and maybe you *SHOULD* pay me to do it. Help me out of the debt trap you facilitate. Maybe then, you'd get a fucking clue. But don't worry—I'll *never* sleep with y—"

"Savoy, that's enough." (The voice sounds...)

"Oh, I'm just gettin' *started* over here. There's plenty more in the..."

It's Mr. Clemence.

I let out a sound resembling a wheeze.

"Savoy, you've made a scene in front of these people, and in front of your coworkers. I think it best that you not continue any further, for the sake of your reputation."

"No, I was just foolin'. Just joshin'. The boss stuff—we've got this gag going where I call him—"

"I came in here to check on your well-being following the funeral. I can see that recent events must have taken a toll on you."

"H—I can make you a drink. Anything you like." (I put the croissant down.) "Let me explain. So many things. Doxxing. The funeral. My Pawpaw, he was—Ah, fuck it. You never cared about me anyway. You just wanted a replacement wife or daughter 'cause yours are dead. You all want something. You're all the *same.*"

Ding. Ding.

"Zavoy, you're-a paying for zat, and you're-a fired."

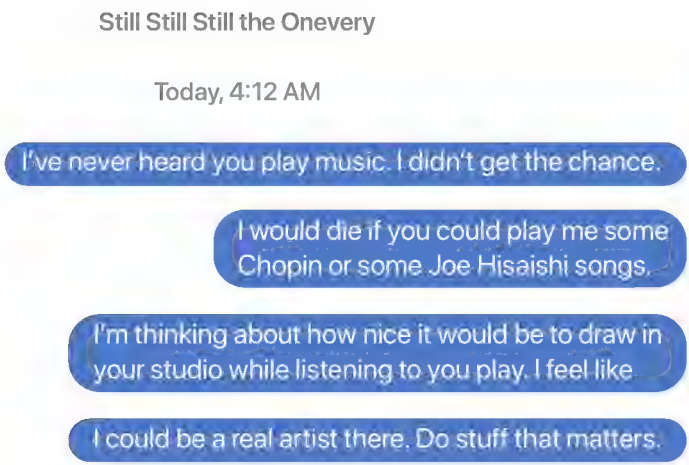
65

Julia reaches out for the first time in a while through Discord. Forgot they existed for a sec.

Tells me the trip didn't go well. They and their friends got drugged and robbed by a group of African club promoters in Shinjuku.

All I say is "Nice work~~! (๑¯◡¯)σ." They block me.

66


Still Still Still the Onevery
Today, 4:12 AM
I've never heard you play music. I didn't get the chance.
I would die if you could play me some Chopin or some Joe Hisaishi songs.
I'm thinking about how nice it would be to draw in your studio while listening to you play. I feel like
I could be a real artist there. Do stuff that matters.

Papiii

We could write music together! 🎼😈
I can do the lyrics, and you can play.

We could be like Radiohead but not

I started learning French on Duolingo a little while back. I wanted it to be a surprise so I could speak with you and impress you. I tried Russian too but it was so hard!

I haven't been sleeping

Bought some shrooms form the dispensary; the guy said they'd help

I'm gonna make a tea out of them

What's your favourite kind of tea? I feel you'd be a green tea guy, decaf probably.

Funny, you worked at a cafe, but you've never mentioned liking coffee.

I got fired yesterday.

lol

Cure was so shit any way

I'm already running out of money.

I was thinking of threatening to unionize for a laugh, but

You can have my old job if you need one. I'll send you Raphael's number.

(He sucks)

[sent with Slam! effect]

778-988-15XX

[sent with Slam! effect]

What would happen if I mixed my dex with the shrooms

lmao

PLZ RESPOND

[sent with Slam! effect]

Savoy.

●●●

[Avery is typing]

67

#SFUBCEarthSciences
#SFUBCMath
#SFUBCEnglish
#SFUBCEngineering
#SFUBCPhysics
#SFUBCGeneralSciences
#SFUBCTheatre
#SFUBCDance
(. . .)

[SFUBC DISCORD]

General Discussion

[ ] dogeenheim
Anyone have any recs for bio tutors? I got torched on my last test 💀

[ ] VeryBurntToaster
has anyone taken classes with prof abdelaziz before. is he any good.

there's an opening in his 217 course next semester but i don't wanna take it if he's trash

[ ] ShammyMrMrsMisterMx

he's chill. kinda boring. easy marker.

[ ] smhamlin

any study groups for chem 302? i need help deadass

[ ] SigmaxSavoy

Ayyyyy homies. What the fuck is uuuup? Ya girl's back wid a vengeance! She's comin back to SFUBC!!!!

I took 3 thingies of dex last night and did my whole WUEC application (rough couple of semesters) in one go. Don't know if any of you have been through this but the counsellor woman said you should submit it to one of the other million useless counselors, but I skipped that step CUZ i'm just BUILT DIFFERENT 👽

My medical history's straight fucked, so there's no way they're gonna deny it. if they do, i'll kill myself
lol

THE BOTANY DREAM IS ALIVE MOTHERFUCKERS! I'M GONNA SAVE THE WORLD WITH MY DANK AZZ PLANT CREATIONS!!! BIG MONEY MOMMY!!!
Are there any places on campus to hang out that aren't fucked? I came up to campus a bit ago, and it was trash.

I'm down to clown with some cool ppl, tho

🤡🤡🤡

plz no froggie girls or ace guys

I'm still in love with my ex

Anyone else do the WUEC app recently?

Here's a soijack pic of me completing mine:

68

Savoyleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fucked

Did shrooms last night and walked the train tracks.

They didn't help me sleep, but they did make me feel a bit better.

Wondered what it would be like to take shrooms during a lab; observe mice clinical trial footage while completely beamed out of my skull.

Ended up writing a tight 5-minute comedy set on how mice are man's best friend. When you think about it, mice *are* our best friends—millions of them die per year so we can have shampoos that don't make us itchy. For weightloss injections instead of going for walks. It's criminal.

It came out pretty funny, honestly. Gave me an idea to finally go do for an open mic night! 🎤😋

Dax doesn't work there anymore, so it won't be as bad.[147]

Tried to write some poems—they were too fucked. The shrooms made everything...fuzzy. Caterpillar-y, but for your emotions.

Left Avery more messages.

The loneliness and heartbreak made me travel all the way back to Noah, princely, *paragonal* Noah—and the dissembling, *prostitutal* Evangelista "Spider Lily."

Something came over me—I had to know how they were doing. Started with her. Easy find. She's an RN now. Blonde. (Guess it was hair dye back then.) No piercings. One visible tattoo of skyline on left forearm. Husband. Two healthy kids. More on the way. Fucking figures.

Noah? I'd always resisted the urge to look him up. Wanted to keep things... unblemished. Took longer than usual because my fingers were all over the place. He still lives in Toronto—Morningside in Scarborough. In the most recent photo he added, he looked frail. Someone had tagged him in a post about him going missing for 48 hours last year. He posts a lot of Facebook quiz results. His bio is about forgiveness. He's a fentanyl addict.

[147] His new PC arrived yesterday. His gamer noises kept me up all night.

69 (😉)

Please Respondvery

Today, 1:59 PM

Avery

Please never do fences anal

Fentanyl***

It ruins limes.

Lives***
Promise me. Even if I'm not in your life.

[Sent with Slam! effect]

You're too precocious

Precious*

Fuck autocorrect and that noise. I'm turning it back off.

you're too precious to me, to everyone

i would die for you if you gave me the chance; you need only ask

you and your MASSIVE sculptor arms!

[Sent with Heart effect]

OH YEAH

I"M GING BACK TO SCHOOL

(WELL, NOT YET BUT I THINK I"M GETTING BACK IN)

[Sent with Slam! effect]

why won't you answer me?

it's getting to be cruel. i know i missed up

please

i'll come by your apartment

NOT in stalky way

we can talk

[5 missed calls]

please

i don't want a life without you

school would be just a bad distraction

i want you, eery part of you always, eternally

do you remember our pinky swear

[3 missed calls]

oh god please

your insta's doing something funny

OI

WAS ALL THIS THEN

[sent with Slam! effect]

70

The Poisoned Generation

In all aspects of life, increasingly ridiculous poisons are injected and disseminated without so much as a second thought. Every day new reports emerge, a new "finding" in this regard: Babies who ate this brand of synthetic corn puff treat suffered irreversible endocrinological damage. Groundskeepers who used that brand of weedkiller are now developing carcinomas in record-breaking numbers. Plastics have been found in the bioluminescent lanterns of inaccessible deep-sea anglerfish. Climate change will turn the earth into Uranus in 30 seconds unless you commit to buying 400 EV vehicles from our affiliate car manufacturers!

People were developing all sorts of illnesses back when chemical manufacturing initially got going. (Thanks, Rockefeller.) Then, we moved to the asbestos-type phase, where we saw the chemicals those wicked souls manufactured turned loose on the public. And now this phase—the GMO/microplastic/polyester/polyurethane/*sneed* oil/etc. movement! And as its casual adherents, its *doomed inheritors*, we, the young, the ones who've known only this toxicity, this *ontological venom* our entire lives may rightly be considered *The Poisoned Generation*.

We will not grow. We will not prosper. This is the end of days for physiological actualization. The Age of Malformation is upon us! (Adulthood has now been reduced to the zenith at which one may show the greatest physical capacity to ingest more toxins!) Even during the sacking of Carthage, you could eat a tomato that didn't make your testicles shrink. See what has been engraved upon us since pre-conception—the mark of the intoxicated! Our demarcated *planned* obsolescence!

The lady on the bus I'm telling this to doesn't appear terribly pleased with my theory. She's been fidgeting away from me, and presently, she's reaching for the "Request Stop" pull-line. She exits the bus before I start my tangent on the satanic origins of Monsanto, overcoming the left-right political dichotomy, ol' Teddy K., and raising an army of the homeless to overthrow the neoliberal death cult paradigm.

Why does this keep happening?

71

estelle ng

Today, 4:34 PM

hey

we don't really know each other but i remember seeing you at panacea a lot when i was going there.

this is avery's ex (i guess? feels weird to sat that)

say*

something really bad happened to himand he won't answer my messages.

i tried texting and calling his actual number but got nothing.

figured you were probably maybe still in touch.

could you message him for me and ask how he's doing?

he doesn't have to message me back. all i wanna know is if hes okay.

wait r you the stalker egirl freak who was after avery

u got him fired

i didnt mean to

guuuuuuurl

it's giving desperation

let it goooooooo

72

The Trouble with Being Based / Thus Spoke Savoyathustra

Some would be born into the bile of Western society. Others, its tears.

❧

Erect I make a resolution; flaccid I revoke it. Sitting, I merely overthink it.

❧

That we might better compare ourselves to *the apple* in the Garden of Eden.

❧

Alexa, call our bull. My wife's ready to be fucked again.

❧

The overtly racist, the deathly sardonic, the maliciously anti-government (this is *not* the current left, who has been subsumed by the entities they used to fight), the anti-celebrity, the cybernetically ruthless...In brief: I trust no man except one who is willing to risk jail time to post a poorly worded rant on Facebook.

❧

The greatest cure for superficial extremism (the internet variety) is not merely love, but sustained, uncompromising interpersonal gummy-bear eating.

❧

Of the tortured souls I've encountered, my fellow insomniacs remain the dearest. Every night brings a private mutiny, a capsize not worth discussing. So, we might say—any person who can't sleep at night is still redeemable.

❧

When I speak of authenticity or integrity in thought or action, I mean thought or action that does not come packaged from a source, is not clarified or reified through the consumption of propaganda, forced opinion, or religious dictums; is not spurred from collective psychosis, cognitive dissonance, or similar poisoned streams (dead grandparents) we allow to flow

into us. I mean, independent thought that exists tangentially to influence and that which is derived from the self in accordance with the will.

❧

The ironist makes the worst kind of lover. Even the seriousness of penetration is rife with melancholic disdain, a hidden resignation. (I miss you! Aw, fuck, do I miss you...)

❧

Anonymous, unmoderated online forums are the id of humanity. Anonymous, moderated forums are the ego. Moderated, identity-based forums are the superego.

❧

The Revolution will be fought in slides and bucket hats.

❧

Ours is a deeply ironic age. A *pathologically sarcastic age*. For this reason, it now benefits everyone to become a student of this eupeptic art!

❧

A burnt-out society can't manage proper hedonism any more than a gall stone can grow wings.

❧

You are the sin you acknowledge.

❧

The greater your degree of removal from society, the greater your longing for its destruction. To think I could have been saved by a weekly meet-and-greet...a welcoming farmers' market...

❧

For the contrarian: a natural revulsion to the status quo. Easier to dry out your own entrails than offer the *consensus*.

❧

We deserve that which we are apathetic toward. More, we *hyperstitize* it.

❧

Some hide from The Void, some laugh into it, some would fluoride-stare into it.

❧

19th century: a hum
20th century: a burp
21st century: a yawn

If the 20th century was spent under Satan's heel, the 21st will be spent in his lap.

❧

I find no greater fidelity than with those who have suffered monstrous, ineffable torments. Like two bait worms asking after family.

❧

Every so often, *truth* (factuality applied honestly—a storybook impossibility) must be made to wear its livery, or else it risks *being a bore*.

❧

Everyone thinks the satirist is always on the lookout for the next thing to ridicule, when really she's hoping with every part of herself that the day will come when she finds nothing.

❧

Ebonics dun goin' be da lingua franca of da tweeny-firf century, big dawg. It should come as no surprise that we no longer have the words to express divinity. And on that note—where will you fit into the post-industrial racial democracy? How about the supra-industrial melanin monarchy? *A spectre is haunting the West—the spectre of gay mulatto globalist neo-feudal technocracy.*

❧

I try not to picture things so boring as end goals, so fanciful as utopias. We've never come so close as the starting line.

❧

Nothing more fashionable than being dead inside. My theory: Our world demands emotional responses at every turn—advertising, interpersonal relationships, social media. Those who have grown cold, barring significant mental illness, are those who have hit the threshold for emotional output and have been willed past it.

❧

One trip to the core of any major city (or bus commute through it to a terrible workplace) is enough to convince you of *end-of-days* notions.

❧

Add onto the everyman's plate the need to dictate his own fate in the absence of divine mandate. He will place it next to the need to buy milk from 7-Eleven.

❧

In the Perfect World of Control (*i.e.*, *this*), grassroots movements are grown in greenhouses.

❧

If he's a cat dad, he's probably infertile. Likewise if he eats Hot Pockets.

❧

Strength will be supplanted in the name of Stamina (the nu-serf/neo-slave will be prized for her ability to carry out menial tasks *ad infinitum*). Intelligence will find its rival in Cunning (a clear, healthy mind isn't needed—but an adaptive mind, capable of invention new ways of acquiring currency and optimizing current infrastructure is always in demand!). Self-determination will erode until it takes on the flavour of complacency in civic and personal matters. In every way, we will see the emergence of a new Homo Sapien. First: *Homo Dedecus*. Then, many years later: *Homo Humiliatus*.

❧

A million tweets aren't worth the gunpowder of one well-aimed cartridge.

❧

The state of any society may be judged upon the state of its average citizen's capacity to draw *Shrek* porn.

❧

The non-Avery art of today has inverted the time-honoured process for the discernment of its value. Instead of vying for your interest, your judgment, art now presupposes that you rise to *it*. Avoid this art. It is an unpollinated rose, a vacuous craft wherein meaning may be freely attributed to inferior works by those in positions of power (the *pundits*—those risible pricks, those vendors

of sophistry and confusion), or, in the worst cases, those who transparently wish to *profit.* (Something in the human spirit lusts after beauty, but more than anything, it wishes to masticate upon beauty.)

❧

Our age's reincarnation of Buddha is too busy playing *Valorant* on Twitch to attain spiritual enlightenment.

❧

Meme posters are the new missionaries.

❧

Machiavelli could not have predicted the methods through with we are controlled now. We suckle at Sun Tzu's wet dreams.

❧

Protesters—mobilized potatoes.

❧

Multi-racial children like yours truly—an Irish, Ukrainian, black *slave squared*—bear the burden of hoisting two (or more) flags that they can never lay full claim to. They then attach themselves to what they most closely resemble. But this inevitably turns out to be an infinitely small, amorphous collection of other confused multi-flag bearers. Why do this to someone willingly, least of all your own? (As a rule, then: Beware the parenthetical. Beware the hyphenated!)

❧

Bring us your crack-addicted; bring us your deadbeats. Let them dance and be merry and never marry and construct their foundations upon Stygian shores! Let them build castles of curls and heterochromia and then abandon them to time and whimsy.

❧

The average tribe is now a wine-infused book club or a car owners' rally.

❧

To compensate for timeless goals, we try new types of hot sauces.

❧

Whenever you tire of others, seek the company of animals. It is precisely their *inability* to communicate their real thoughts and impulses that we find so rewarding. I fear if we were to know them well, they would become as intolerable as man. (My dear Sisyphuses...)

In the West, religion has been reduced to a dating profile choice. (God is not merely dead—he is *fossilized*.)

If multi-culturalism was a *happy* state of existence, why must we be reminded of its utility by potato chip companies at every possible juncture?

So the elites say: The first thing to be built on Mars will be a Walmart!

The Overton window isn't shifting—it's *closing*. (And so we are drawn to self-defenestration!)

Even if a Caesar (me) were to exist among us, walking the same grungy streets, as embodiment of the Nietzschean ideal (the Dionysian, the will-to-power), they wouldn't be able to ascend to a position of power. Too many restraints are placed upon the populace. The Rubicon is now miles wide, and no longer of water but quicksand. (Let me work, damnit!)

Bring me digital assassination! For self-sabotage is the patrician way, and amicicide the divine.

Hell is—the hoeless. (Get your shmoney up, pleighboi!)

Ask the difficult questions. Ask the uncomfortable questions. Ask the questions that would go *beyond* the bone. (NOT sexual.)

Living well is offered as sufficient opposition to disenfranchisement.

This somehow implies that being happy and productive might someway emancipate you from the conclusions you've reached. What could it be, though, but a dereliction of duty?

❧

There is a distinct difference between the villain and the *virtuous* villain.

❧

Even suicide, one of the great topics, has lost its significance. Experience has shown that when someone speaks of it now (especially the young), it's out of a desire to avoid embarrassment or boredom ("Ugh, I wanna die!")

To see suicide also enter the realm of the *gimmick*...

Either kill yourself over the big things or the hopelessly specific. Only the fool kills herself over something like *a job*. Take this life as yours, instead, and risk becoming a 21st-century Cassandra. Or else, founder as Ophelia.

❧

The over-examined life is not worth living, either.

❧

Is it not a surprise that a woman, a *femoid* (👾), is present at both a career's inception *and* its ruination?

❧

A radical idea: no major medical intervention until a citizen has reached an age suitable for having children. Then, a comfortable life with the help of modern medicine. *But not until then.*

❧

Freedom has ever been a nebulous concept associated with theorems and ideals. But even this finds diminution in our discourse. We're left to wonder what it *excretes*.

❧

One must only twist the doctrine, pull at its sleeve, and a new parasite is born. Behold: Institutional Science! System of the inculcated! (I will never be a botanist!)

❧

"Strength restored by wounding." The greatest of Roman notions since forgotten! What if we were to wound everyone? Every cell? Starting with ourselves?

We see this *moral code* (forced on us) to be afflicted with a gangrene, yet we cling to it. As the great prophet Avery Bazin once declared, your task is to prick the dying beast so many times, and so often, that it succumbs to the death it longs for.

When Savoy speaks, the Devil shivers. When Dax speaks, the Devil puts in his AirPods.

BPD, mania, psychosis—I see a day in which we trade them like Pokémon cards!

Love—tyrant of our inconsistencies. She who hasn't walked the Champs-Élysées (Kitsilano), lain outside her lover's apartment, and vomited her ardour for concerned bystanders to marvel at!

The way forward...

How one agonizes over this! What possible way forward is there in the fractured, hyper-concentrated, paradoxically diffuse quasi-reality of today...? I know—watch television show! Forget!

And so, in the end, at the bitterest of lymphatic, thanatotic conclusions, we huddle, we *heave* together in a world of illusions. A *clown world!*

The contemporary normie female (*Thottis terrestris*, hereafter referred to as "woman" or "bimbo") is trained—through her diligent consumption of normie media (how many times she watches and rewatches *Friends*, *Sex Education*, *Bridgerton!*), through her university studies, through her *passivity in the face of programming*—to perceive, above all else, instances of injustice.

Racism, sexism, xenophobia—she will hone in on any instances of these and immediately insert herself into the issue, regardless of her minor or non-existent connection to it. (Even if she would claim she "isn't political"—for such a woman, in truth, does not exist, *cannot* exist, insofar as her nature necessitates the constant absorption of others' ideas, as her philosophy, her anima, is predicated on what is *offered to her* and whatsoever may supplant her need to exercise *her own reason*. It is far too dangerous for her to reflect—this threatens the foundations of the *gynocratic* system that treats her so well, coddles her, spoon-feeds her!)

Doubtless, this extends to the way she filters out potential partners. A man, to meet her exacting standards, must not be any of the things she[148] deems "icky" (better, more to the point, if he is the *opposite* [!] of these, she figures, no matter how it may hurt his body and spirit). And if the potential suitor shows any signs of these—through an ill-timed joke, an anecdote about a "problematic" friend, *an undesirable reaction to the state-funded stimulus*—he is summarily cut off, ghosted, or *flamed out*, for his subterfuge, his perfidy, his *intolerance*.[149] No matter that the woman in her own conduct displays as many "moral" failings as the man—perhaps *more*.[150] Need you confirmation? In her social comportment, what do you see?

- She titillates everyone wherever she goes in her severe crop-tops and underlying piercings (these tops being tailored by the hands of Bangladeshi neo-slaves, those *destitute young girls* she pretends to champion the rights of when convenient!)

- She drinks in excess—no matter the day of week—the desire need only strike her.[151]

- She posts, or reposts, or "likes" the black square, the BLM flag, the Palestinian watermelon iconography, but gives no money or time to the amelioration of the issues concerned.

---

[148] By extension, the system, for the normie woman *is* the system.

[149] Ho! How she bandies around this word as if it were rose-gold plated, moon-charged, crystal-encrusted!

[150] If we're to believe such things as moral precepts exist, which, as the great stones of old, now lie as sand upon the shores of the 2020s—but still, if they didn't, what replacement for this decadence can she offer? What *coherent value system?* We must happily accept conventional morality over *complete valuistic inconsistency,* as she would display.

[151] And look how she must apologize later to those she has burdened with her watery, tarty intemperance, via posts online, private messages (we've all seen those desperate missives to club owners and influencers to take down topless shots after consent had been given)!

Thus, she proudly displays her preening, openly malevolent betrayal (as well as her effortlessly toned mid-riff some of us would move entire mounts of olives to have), her fully formed cognitive dissonance through and around her body (nipples protruding the whole time!).

Ah, but once she's spurned *man #n*—who would have treated her well, loved her, provided her with that which she may not deserve—for failing to meet her standards (causing him to become jaded and distrustful of the rest of womankind, *we leftovers*), she encounters—*creates!*— within the resultant romantic vacuum the "Cock Carousel," as it's been labelled by the most black-pilled and aware among us. Aboard this, her role is to be passed from high-value male (oft-referred to as "Chad" or "Tyrone") to high-value male, these dalliances sometimes lasting less than a night—*never* more than a month or so—and she always fails to receive the requisite romantic commitment *no amount of inculcation or medication can breed her out of needing*. Thereby, she rides the carousel of attractive (with the exception of her ερωτηματικό σπονδυλική στήλη αγόρια[152]), commitment-averse men.[153] But each of her revolutions bringing increased anger, bitterness, *resentment*—and the most shallow, self-inflicted incarnation of it, at that!

What becomes of this cat custodian in the making, when the ride is done with her? Now 31, 32, 33, she invariably begins taking SSRIs to manage the anxiety, the pressing assault of worry that she no longer has *worth,* "the goods," anything to show for all her mighty ideals and virtues she has displayed these years! She let them ejaculate in her, but she took precautions not to get *too* many STIs along the way! She took the birth control! She used the condoms, the spermicidal lube! The lecturers, media pundits, advocates,

[152] Savalter Kaufmann notes the literal translation of the Greek here as "question-mark spine boys." The best living example of this would be Dax Warner of Coquitlam, BC. These boys—typically young, low-status, *Final Fantasy*-obsessed, and moderately (if not, formerly) attractive—serve as waypoints on the Cock Carousel for some women, as, between dalliances with Chad and Tyrone, they sometimes find it necessary to elevate their confidence by seeking the attention and company of filler men, from whom they may receive free Don's, the occasional Bubly, and/or time-consuming sex. This may be compared to historical situations in which men and women of high status discreetly took slave lovers or visited known brothels during times of leisure. In more concerning cases, the bimbo's constant exposure to birth control pills from an early age (how our physicians *[pharmaceutical pawns]* prescribe these to teens at will!) vitiates her ability to distinguish high-value males from low-value ones!

[153] Being of such a high value in her eyes, such strong mates with so many form-fitting crop tops and impromptu vacations to Bali and free meals of fresh Olympia oysters and hand-fed grapes to offer, they escape the purviews of her socially conscious ire, her indefatigable crusade, and are free to mistreat her.

celebrities, shills, never warned her of this! Of the loneliness and self-doubt that comes with being *like, a really fucking good person, actually, who did the damned thing*. So what is left for her in this world? She may have some money remaining from living so breezily, so high on the hog.[154] Maybe she could still reel in a man—albeit, one of lesser worth than she's used to, one she wouldn't give the time of day to in her heyday, one that *doesn't get her wet*. She could offer him financial incentives, perhaps. But oh—she must run to her physicians—whom she has begun to see too often already, who've begun to deem her a "sensitive case"—to up her prescription and inquire about surgical alterations because the trap doesn't seem to be working! He got away! He said it was *because of her age! Because of her mileage! Because of her attitude!* They all seem to get away! (The Carousel has vitiated her brain's ability to form lasting partnerships! *She*, they know, could leave at any moment, you see, for she still fancies herself the prize they must *win!)*

Mightily, she struggles against these forces of age and devaluation, but her constitution can't endure. It gives way! She must settle for the lowest-value male she's ever known—one who *may* give her a child before it's too late. Before she's dry! But he has issues, or he may not want children (he has also succumbed to the programming in his own way), or he may not be able to. Her final salvation, to raise another life and through it start her life again, slips away, just as the prescriptions (multiple) increase again:[155] Males #a-z have already moved on and have wives and better lives and look happy, happy, oh, happy on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook. Ah...Ah...

So she must appeal to—*accept*—her ultimate role—the final *grapes* (now sour) of her delusion—and tell herself she *did not want any of that anyway*. She lived *her truth*, she cries to those who will listen at family gatherings, down grocery store snack aisles, at weddings (crucially, at the events celebrating others' happiness!). She was true to herself! Herself! *Herself*! But maybe she could get a job in a position of authority, she figures, something forward-facing, where she might instruct the women of the next generation so that

[154] All the while she was working on the soul-smashing "career" in nursing, HR, administration, corporate subservience.

[155] These prescriptions become a life-long constant and never go away, no matter her attempts to wean herself off them or to heal or to "be kind to herself." No vacation or pricey wellness seminar will do the trick now in calming her frayed nerves and battered psyche, for they cannot replace what she has lost. Just as the crop tops she no longer allows herself to wear no longer look the same on her frame, the fluoxetine no longer *does its job.* To this end, the Röcken bei Lützen Department of Food and Agriculture determined during a recent study that 100% of medicated Cock Carousel victims were fated to remain on at least three different serotonergics until their death and requisite consumption via beloved kitties.

they can learn her ways, understand and find *her brand of happiness!* Enter: The female educator, the upper-level management #girlboss, Damocles' expectant sword!

(Why yes—I *am* currently listening to "Misery Business" by Paramore.)

73

April 25, 202X

To: savoy.matviyenko@sfubc.ca
From: admissions@sfubc.ca

Subject: WUEC Application

Dear Savoy,

Thank you for submitting your Withdrawal Under Extenuating Circumstances application.

While reviewing your application, we received numerous reports of your misconduct on the SFUBC's online platforms—specifically, our Discord, which we regard as a safe space for students of all races, creeds, and backgrounds to engage with one another in constructive discourse.

Additionally, we received a video submission from an anonymous source that depicts you, or someone of your description, interfering with an art exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Though we cannot confirm that this is you, and we would welcome you to discredit this, we take concerns of this nature very seriously.

This, coupled with your conduct online, has ultimately led us to the decision to forego considering your WUEC application at this time.

If you wish to dispute this ruling, you may contact one of the counsellors at our Academic Advising Centre, the contact information of which can be accessed via our online portal.

We wish you well with your academic goals going forward.

Sincerely,

James H. Creese,
Dean of Admissions

I respectfully acknowledge the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw *(Squamish), səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), q̓ićəy̓* (Katzie), *kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo and Tsawwassen peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our four campuses occupy space.*

We are seeking donations for the 2024 Indigenous Sun Run! A portion of the proceeds will go toward the SFUBC Fund for Indigenous Happy Times! If you are interested in sponsoring a runner, please click the following link: indigenoussunrun.sfubc.ca

74

Down an Oudin Shopber s Drug Mar t

Wen ona niht walk the oatha n stumble in a t a the sShoppers Drug ga lyke uh yung chaucer (??) nd the acndady aidsle an about two packa s cgummy aworms (Hair i bO 👄) [gluco-muco-frugto-tose, zucre, pec tin, gorn stargch, whit e bees waz, childs tearz, bear hoof. face etx. xt.] an 555 Reesee cu p s ! (lik An nuh uh) (2 many) except i don lie metha do ne done need id an 1 thinga popgorn 🍿n no moar deksa drine 💊 for uhwhile can mix wih shrooms 🍄 no sleeb a looked in a the freeze her (hongry anan()an put my head in a the freeze er an god cold an chekd oud the hair segction an thod bout buyding casther oil alwa ys so much worg an bud didnt n hair colo r ing all at the pretthe prett he girlsonthe colour ing boxhis (he ahe!) LorealSplatGarnierNutrisse PerfectSchwarzkekspeckof becum red blonde hair brun ette colourcream 5.7 7.3 8.9 midnightblack noones buyeeng thad 1.0 the blaqks ⚫ n the asiyun 🟨 ones left behind logged up ‘cuz st olen lots (?/) an i be sittin in frunna dem eyein lot s an can i becum red blonde aryan 2? ? lik they sell uh more than hair gelluh gene gel n uh i pud i ton my gen ohm an i cum out fulyl whyte yt an adjust ted then Aver he liges me again i ged the soft hair no no nuh curls n nuh casyster oil nuh more nuh joejoebad oiyul nuh more shaym moischure sayve $chmony 2 ged the pink nippuls pink 🩷 pu$$y pink mouf skin spotsthada cute nod gross liek myne perke tyts bluegreengrey eyes so rare recess siev brilee ance (pinq lips! !) recess iev &domina ANT AC GT GE NE lies lies! lies! 🧬 (((scientiqfue comm m munity)) lyi ng abou t more (pink q nostri llls!) jus wane pbe pretyy!

try ing to steel frummee! dest in knee! whad ey can bee! n Revlonun (Platinum Blondde) (lumin us powder—on me) un loogs good n chic terrible n thizll work n oben the packag e n i take it an but in burse an some1 sees (?) an i t don matder iv they see eyell be pretty n aryan soon n no jail an Avery he liges me again hes will lige me again an ga ta tha self-chegout an think bou paying an don an jus walg out whadday thay gonna do kill me? gha ha ye righ corpor policy ssay "don chase afta perps u culd get hurded" so they don walk out inna the streetee see homeless beoble (unhomed rehomed dehomed mehomed i dun no anymore term is) tage aan Uber no no walk a Commershul Station 🗃️ slip on a sir ringe why don i? fall ged AIDS lol guy slummep over on eis own lap me 2 brotha 2me 2ppl in window Shoeprps Drug they pointin at me wave wave (wave) back! 👋 me i be loved by A very soon eys me yes me Sav our r oy Savois Sig ma sugma Savoirous ious aha ba ae ba me hum ad didalee! guy fuck in shouder bump me! walk inta me? "AYY MAN FUCK 🤬" ppl can even anymore no decenzy on these streets (she ferda streetz bro vro bro) wanna swim wan an swim walk out inna traffic wanna swim hciwcheger comes first see where tha night tages me ha AH cry yeah see where i go from ehre tears haha i'm invicibb ell din you no all thaz leffff im comin 🏃‍♀️ Avery some1 god?

75

water

water

water water water

water water

water

water water

water water

water water

water water

water water

water water

me >:3

water water

water water

water

65

76

АНН!
(АНН!)
[АНН!]
АНН!
(АНН!)
[АНН!]
АНН!
(АНН!)
[АНН!]
shiki

77

...

awake cold very cold

dax says (i) slept for two days

came home with three bottles of platinum hair dye

gummy bear wrappers & was soaking wet was

mumbling about the inlet avery shoppers

white women [he told avery]

almost died [replied "please get her help"]

can't remember anything (water?)[156]

yet

.

[156] [water?]

78

Unknown

Yesterday, 2:55 PM

Back to Edmonton comes the little piglet,
She illumines herself a little cigarette,
Ushers all around the boulevard,
Through every loving home's front yard,
They don't know she's a contaminated whore
From tainted soil an abominable nature that abhors,
Dispersing her deleterious decay about the city,
Engendering everything in her path to become filthy,
She is branded with the mark of the unloved,
Cursed to walk without the one that she loved.

How dare you come back, you'll never encounter another with a essence divine you used up slut don't even try

I am your master, I've been your master all along and now you think you can come back without gravelling

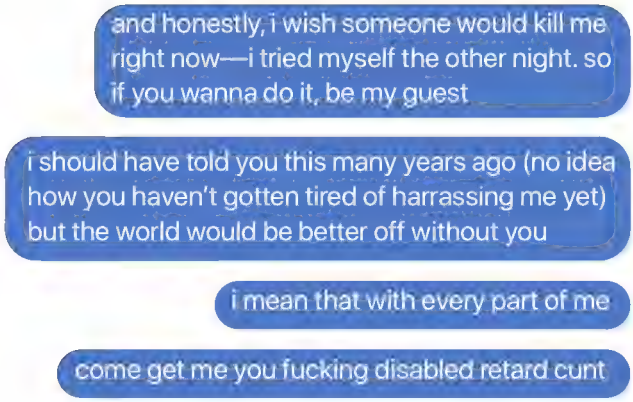
there are punishments for this you knew this

Today, 8:01 PM

normally, matthew, i would see another one of your brain-damaged, Kinder egg prize inside riddler-ass cryptic messages and be scared the whole day but i simply don't give a fuck anymore

you must be even more cte'd than i thought

i left edmonton over a week ago; if you wanted to hurt me or kill me, you should have done it whilei was still there


and honestly, i wish someone would kill me right now—i tried myself the other night. so if you wanna do it, be my guest
i should have told you this many years ago (no idea how you haven't gotten tired of harrassing me yet) but the world would be better off without you
i mean that with every part of me
come get me you fucking disabled retard cunt

79

April 28, 2024

To: elijiyehd@dickfalinocomedy.com
From: savi.matvi69420funnyguy@gmail.com

Subject: Open Mic Night ;D

Hi Elijiyeh,

I just wanted to email you regarding potentially securing a spot for an upcoming Open Mic Night.

I'm a regular at the Club. If I had to guess how many shows I've been to at your fine establishment over the past few years, I'd say 50. I've also eaten everything on the menu at least once; you can ask Matt in the kitchen. That includes the themed specials. And I've met most of your staff (including you once waaay back!) I've spent countless hours watching comedy over the last few years, and I feel I'm finally ready to show your lovely patrons what I've got.

I've written a five minute set on mice (sounds weird but I promise it's good) that I think'll be a hit. If you need I can send over a typed sample.

In case it comes up, yes, I'm Dax's roommate. I know he got fired (he deserved it), but I'm nothing like him. At all. I'm much more trustworthy than that bum. I swear on George Carlin's ghost.

I'd be fine with any night -- I can make it work. I'm a nice guy. I'll bring the funny. Promise.

You can reach me at this email address: savi.matvi69420funnyguy@gmail.com, or on IG @sigmasavoyart. Please let me know if you have any questions.

All the best!
Savoy

April 29, 2024

To: savi.matvi69420funnyguy@gmail.com
From: elijiyehd@dickfalinocomedy.com

Hey Savoy,

Your name did sound familiar. I asked around, and they told me you were the girl with the cool hair. Matt said you never get sauces with your food XD

I like it. You're in.

Next Monday at 7:00 PM. You'll get five minutes, but you don't need to use all of it if you don't want to.

Some beginners like to read off their phones. You can bring yours. Turn the ringer off if you do.

Food will be half-price for the amateur performers.

If you need to cancel, respond to this.

See you soon,

Elijiyeh Dimaline
Booking and Talent Relations
Dick Falino's House of Comedy

80

Have you ever Joker laughed, but in a bad way?

81

This Happened to My Buddy Savoy

I arrive at Dick Falino's Vaudeville Villa and Children's Play Place 23 minutes and 37 seconds early, after stopping in the New West SkyTrain station to re-apply my war paint (clown makeup) and listen to a vagrant tell me about the signs from God he's been seeing around the city, that the rapture (*moi*) is coming.

I gave him $20 that I didn't have and told him to keep reading the signs, brother.

Esteban (part-timer) receives me at the door and lets me know we'll be using the lower, better room, the full stage (not the small, dark one upstairs they normally use for amateur nights), for tonight's event.

I give him a $5-er that I also don't have and tell him to watch for the signs, too, brother.

The room's aglow tonight. Brighter than it's ever been. Ordinarily, you can't catch the hints of gold trim in the wallpaper, the lilting voice hidden inside the velvet burgundy curtains, the stamped charisma of the carpet stains. But tonight! Oh, yeah—tonight! They jeer! They holler! They sing themselves alive with alacrity, scream their way into your vision! It's a ballroom once more. Everything's out there, ready to be heard, *ingested*.

Biggest Monday crowd I've ever seen. At least 40 people. They knew! Of *course* they did. Ha ha. The mice!

We can sit wherever we like, said Esteban. Well, I very well might. The back corner for me! Matt, Matt's head's poking out from the corner bar. Shall we go say hi?

"Hi, hi!"

"Hey, Sav. Haven't seen you around too much lately. How ya been? Did you get around to watching *The Boy and the Heron*? Good, right?" Slaps a towel over his shoulder.

"Ooohh, peachy. Peachy-nice! I'm so peachy!"

"Wait, whoa—what happened to your hair? And *what* are you wearing?"

"I got funnier."

"You're an odd duck, aren't you? Thought you might stop coming after Dax got let go. You here for the amateur night?"

"Right-o."

"This one's special—they've got some pros working new material mixed in with the amateurs. Should be a gooder."

"Hey, Matt, let me give you a tip 'cause you're pretty cool—don't come to Dick Falino's Fuck Hut on Monday..."

"I hate to break it to you, but it *is* a Monday."

"Ahh, you wouldn't get it. Never mind."

"Ooookay. Are you gonna order something?"

"I'll get what I fucking deserve."

"Errr...Ha ha...I...don't know what that means."

"Is Thomas Wayne here?"

"Name doesn't sound familiar. I gotta get back to the kitchen."

"I have a condition." (He's already out of earshot.)

No Don Rickles cock burgers tonight. No Wanda Sykes segments. No Adam Sandler vanilla-and-nut smoothies. Food is an afterthought—don't know the last time I ate something that wasn't a Hornby bar (Avery's bar of choice), gummies, or a cigarette.

Some of the people at the front are standing and chatting. They look like comedians (soft caps, thick glasses, graphic Ts, cargo pants with those dumb loose fabric belts that flop around in front of you; one female who's got a stick firmly wedged up her flabby ass). Could go talk to them. Won't. Nope.

Everyone else is *regular*, regular. Here for a show. Elijiyeh enters the room and taps one of the comedians on the shoulder. *Show* must be starting soon! Looking around the room? Searching, searching—for me? Me, me!

Elijiyeh spots me. Waves me over to the group.

I sprint.

"Hey there. Wow! Such enthusiasm!" he says. *(To all of us now)* "Show's not starting yet—but it is starting in..." (he peeks at his Apple Watch) "Six minutes. I've got the order here for you guys, starting with Shawna. Then, it's Aaron, Khai, Savoy, Marcus, Josh, Mateo, and Kaedyn. Amateurs first, then the pros. Most of you guys know the drill, but if you don't, or in case you forgot or *didn't read the email*—a minimum of five if you want it. If you're trying to work the crowd in, or you're killing it, or you need a bit extra to finish the last bit, we'll give you another one or two. Watch for my flashlight at the back. You see that, you've got one minute left. I flash you again, you're going over. If at any point I flash you early in your set, that's a bad sign. Don't be that guy or girl or other who stays up on stage way too long. We won't book you again if you do. If you don't want your full time, that's cool. Set the mic down on the stool and we'll bring the next person up. Feel free to plug your shit, but don't make it too long. You can use your phone or cue cards. Don't leave your flashlight or ringer on. I have to say this every time, and every time, someone does it. We don't care who's texting or calling you. Only your momma does. Pros, you've got 15. Do your thing. Questions?"

None.

"Shawna, you're up first. You can wait here by the edge of the stage. The rest of you, take your seats. If you're next up, come stand by the edge of the stage here"—he points—"to keep things moving faster. I don't wanna have to track you down. Remember, everyone—let's have some fun, and let's do what we came here to do: make 'em laugh. I'll be MC'ing, but if you need to talk to me for any reason, stand in that spot by the corner of the stage. Sound good?"

The group hums their approval.

"Savoy," he says, "Can I speak to you for a moment?" He walks me away from the group, toward a corner of the room. "We love when comics come with original bits, but are you sure you wanna wear that on stage?"

"I am. Goes with the makeup."

"Does this relate to the mice bit?"

"You could say that."

"I'm gonna trust you on this one. Matt and the gang spoke highly of you."

"Yes, sir. I won't let you down."

"Atta girl. Enjoy the show. Head up to the line once Brad comes off."

"You got it, Sarge!" I salute (🫡)

He hits the stage to kick things off.

Shawna's set is fucking ass. Straight up dogwater. The same beaten-to-shit vagina jokes recycled or, worse, down-cycled. She starts with a glowing rumination on the quality of today's men on the dating apps, their affinity for fish pictures, their inability to commit, their insistence on talking about crypto over drinks at one of the city's many pretend speakeasies, where she requires they take her because she likes the garlic aioli fries there. ("If I hear another guy say the word 'Ethereum,' I'm gonna puke!") And they suck at sex, apparently! Holy moly! They can't find her clitoris! *Wee woo, wee woo! New joke alert!*

She says she has mommy issues and doesn't elaborate. Have to bite my hand to stop myself from heckling. She complains about being hit on at the grocery store and ends her petty, ill-mannered sewage set by recounting a time she told a younger man who was hitting on her that his mom should have swallowed him.

Weak charity laughs all throughout—largely from the girls. She takes seven and change because she ignores Elijiyeh's flashes.

Aaron's next—another amateur. His material isn't the worst.

His set is about how he works as a teacher, and how his students are turbo fucking braindead ("How to put it other than this: they've got 'the dumb'"), and how he's beginning to worry. He offers a couple quick jokes about education, how times were simpler before, and then goes straight into the main anecdote about what it's like to try to run a socials class in the current year.

The entry isn't too sloppy—maybe somewhat rushed. He explains that students are functionally illiterate now. When he gets them to do research papers, they mostly use ChatGPT without changing any of the wording, or they paste in the first auto-preview Google result without a citation. He has to explain the differences between WW1 and WW2 six times until

the students get it. ("They think Hitler is either *still alive* or was born in the time of sticks and stones.") And even then, they forget it as soon as the semester is over. Every student wants to be an influencer, but none of them have anything to say, and will probably end up offering up their bodies to strangers, which he didn't want to see. They took pictures of his ass in class and spread them around the school. One student had made a mass group chat exclusively for photos of him. If only they'd put the kind of effort they put into inventing funny filters for their selfies or "getting gud"[157] at games into something constructive, they might be able to make it in life. He doesn't have a strong final joke, so he leaves on this thought.

A few hearty laughs throughout. *Pas mal, pas mal*. He's being too nice to his students.

Khai is up next. I bolt to the side of the stage, knocking into one of the tables at the front and spilling some bozo's drink. He doesn't exist to me right now. Simona, if she hasn't yet birthed her mutant spawn in the alley out back, can clean it up.

Khai is nervous—*strikingly* nervous. He starts with the ultimate in abominable openers: "I g-guess I shouldn't...sit. Th-This is stand-up, after all." I have to propel the back of my head into the wall to resist calling him a slur. He double-clutches into a second non-sequitur about arriving in an electric car. ("It only t-tried to take me to the airp-p-port once!") We're jolted into a follow-up about the price of energy in the city going up ("I l-lose energy j-just looking at the p-prices!") He veers into another non-sequitur about his trip to Japan and the culture shock being "a-as unsettling as a wh-white person serving s-s-s-sushi."[158] It's nothing but stammering and underbaked punchlines from there on out. (*I* stutter, and even *I'm* embarrassed.) He tries to comment on Vladimir Putin. (That he has a weird body for a 70-year-old?) He tries a corporate job joke (unfulfilling, fluorescent lights, staplers, etc.). He brought physical cue cards instead of using his phone (😶). He drops them and catches them under his foot doing another 2-parter about Gen X starting to be out of touch. Unbearable. I'm about to boo so that I can go up faster, but he saves us all the trouble and leaves the mic on the stool. Three minutes, give or take. No crowd-work. Pity laughs. No zingers. Horrid.

They can't hold me back. I'm going. He does a virgin walk past me as he's leaving the stage.

[157] No one uses this term anymore, but I'll give Aaron a pass.

[158] He didn't even end up at *one* of those sex shops in Akihabara where they sell the dog porn and used panties on the top floor. Wonder if he was assaulted like Julia there. He would've liked it, asked for more.

My fuckin' time, baybeee. This is my *8 Mile*. Rap game mom's spaghetti-spiller. The black-and-white Marsha Mathers (without the Epstein's Island visits).

"Thanks for that, Khai. I'll be sure to check my energy bill next month for added charges! Now, I'd like for you to put your hands together for our next act. She's come aaall the way from Coquitlam—one whole bus trip away—to entertain you tonight with a little ditty on mice." (This gets a small laugh.) "She's a regular around the club, and has tried every item on the menu—which you should do also—but this is her first time on stage. Please give a warm welcome tooooo S*avoy!*" Elijiyeh flips the mic to me and exits stage left.

The lights bare down on you much more intensely than when you're in the audience. I can see the showrunner from the office above the mezzanine, behind a pane of darkened glass. That joke Mr. Falino used to make about the lights being so bright he could see his ancestors finally makes sense. And the heat!

I raise the mic to my face, testing the volume with a small cough. "Hi," I say. "I'm S*avoy*. And yes—I am from Coquitlam. Which, I'm not sure if you know, translates to 'smells like fish.' So my apologies to the front row."

They're laughing. They're *laughiiiiiing!!!* 😏 (Is it the outfit, or me? It's gotta be me.)

"And since we're on the subject of food, you're probably looking at me, thinking, 'That girl kiiinda looks like a pineapple' or 'What's that piece of burnt broccoli doing onstage?' I get that all the time. One of the many perks of being a mixed-race future-person. You should try it sometime! Well—you kinda can't unless you get cosmetic surgery, so, on second thought, maybe don't!"

(Hit 'em with the soft ones first, Savi. Lob a few normie jokes over the plate. See? They like your "intentional" slip-ups. They make you relatable!)

"Show of hands—we got any other mixed-race peeps in the house tonight?"

15 people raise their hands.

"Ooo. Things are a little funky in here." (*Turning to one of the guys near the front row.*) "You mind if I ask what your mix is? Sorry, that might've come off as dehumanizing—asking you that like you're some kind of dog breed!"

(More laughs.)

"I'm half-Filipino, quarter-Irish, and quarter-Burmese."

"Mystery meat! I love it. You'd fetch a high price at auction, I'm sure. And how about you, sir? You in the Louis Vuitton knockoff shirt?" (A couple of those laughs that sound like groans—a light-hearted barb landed!)

"Sri Lankan and Puerto Rican."

"Oh my! So your parents had no idea what they were doing when they made you! I have to ask—what does you house smell like? Burnt cinnamon and American ball sweat?"

(Some more good-groans. One or two almost-knee-slaps—I can see them chambering them!)

"I'm just joshin', just joshin'. See, you were expecting mice, and I *was* gonna do that, but you got this instead. I'm ad-libbing. I'm goin' off the rails here."

(Couple giggles.)

"But seriously—I was studying to be a botanist because I love plants and there's no money in art. I recently left school. Apparently, the world already has enough plant doctors. I've been soul-searching the last little while. Looking for a way forward. I'm not much of a *one-door-closes-another-one-opens* kinda person—those people freak me out with their optimism. I don't even think a window opens. This isn't Newtonian physics. There's no equal or opposite reaction. Unless we're talking about porn. That window is *always* open. In fact, it gets *bigger* when you fail in life." (Couples solid chuckles.) "And on top of it all, I went through a breakup recently." (Pause for looks of sympathy.) "Yeah, that wasn't fun. He was the greatest person I've ever met. I have no idea what he saw in a piece of broccoli like me."

God, this is how Janice must've felt on the goop. They're eating out of my hairy palms. I might as well be a star.

That's it—yes—this is a movie! And I'm a star. I steal a quick glance over at Elijiyeh, who's leaning up against the side wall. He grins and nods.

The lights look so good on me. My brown has turned to gold!

I was thinking of coming up on stage and saying the N-word over and over, but this is so much better. This feels—*good*.

Let's keep this rolling—turn up the heat. Slip in some real jokes—the hard-hitting shit.

"When you think about it, breakups are a lot like leaving a terrorist organization. Worry not!—I'll elaborate. My boyfriend broke up with me because—"

And I see Damon. *Date* Damon. *Asexual* Damon.

Front row table. With a girl. Arm around her. Here. *In front of me.*

The disrespect.

Ace, my *ass*.

Lied! *Lied!*

CUT TO:

INT. DICK FALINO'S PERSONAL C&B TORTURE CHAMBER - NIGHT

SAVOY (23.9XXX, approx.) is experiencing a full-blown Dissociative Episode under the blinding lights of the comedy club. She has identified the boy who she now knows lied to her about his sexuality because, in all likelihood, she freaked him out during their date. She wonders if he was the "anonymous" one who sent the video to the SFUBC admin, because one of his roommates, who was in on the LIE, had been present at the gallery that day. Savoy is mid-set.

SAVOY
(irresolutely)
He actually broke up with me because he got doxxed, because of something I...

NAMELESS ART HOE (teens?) strokes DAMON's (20) leg as if to inflict pain upon Savoy.

SAVOY
(struggling to switch gears)
Maybe I should address the, uhh, outfit I'm wearing, 'cause you're probably wondering why I'm d-dressed like a bisexual Joker with sloppily bleached hair. I can't tell you how much I love

that movie. I have a poster of it in my room...The 2019 one--the good one, not the rancid one with Lady...

(shakily)

...it's signed by the director of the mov-v-vie, Todd Phillips.

From the side of the stage, ELIJIYAH (38) looks on, starting to worry. The crowd is growing perplexed. Damon, having now recognized Savoy behind the heavy black clown makeup, bolo tie, parachute pants, and black clown nose, looks on from his table in surprise.

SAVOY

(hung out to dry, cosmically)

S...so I can still do my mouse bit. I think I have e-enough t-time. It's only been...

She reaches into her parachute pants, which she foolishly bought off Temu as soon as she received her invitation to participate in this event, looking for her phone's "Notes" section. She drops her phone as she's taking it out of her cartoonish pants. The pants already have a few threads poking out.

It's only been...uhh...uhh...When did I start? This is just like the f-funeral...

Damon whispers something to Faceless Art Hoe. She giggles and scrunches his shoulder. Mouths "That's mean."

Elijiyah takes his phone out, considering flashing the light.

Something occurs to Savoy. Something treacherous, something between, beyond. Everyone and everything has forsaken her. There is simply no one left to aid her, care for her. In the midst of her psychosis, she arrives at a personal agreement with

herself. A temporary checking-out. A vendetta. A liberation. A punchline without recourse. She is free.

SAVOY

(free, free, free, free, free, free, *free*) I don't know about you guys, but, to pick up on what Aaron was saying earlier, I'm starting to think [redacted] had the right idea. I mean, you keep seeing reports of these Weinstein types, the Dan Schneiders, the Epsteins, the (((redacted))), like the guy I watched do a comedy set here recently, Ari, molesting men, women, children--all comers (no pun intended). You think they'd choose the best of the best, but they're out here raping even total weirdos, like Macaulay Culkin, Bow Wow. Hell, I can understand raping Leonardo DiCaprio like with Brian Peck, but even Orlando Brown got touched. Rapists own the media, too, but they can't suppress this stuff. *[flashlight]* It's getting out of hand. Or, they shuffle people out of the spotlight--*Woody Allen, I'm gonna need you in the back office for a while, 'til the heat from you marrying your Asian stepdaughter dies down a little.* I mean, they do these things, and then they're back in action a few short months later. It's crazy--*crazy*. If you were a man and really wanted to rape people, you ought to get involved with Hollywood in whatever capacity you can--ASAP. Don't confuse me as one of those nag-nag-nag played-out #MeToo types either (that stopped being cool ages ago)--those bimbos suck in their own way--all I'm sayin' is, you might take a few acting lessons, get a nose job, change your name à la Whoopi Goldberg, and knock on every door in LA 'til you find yourself

a gig that lets you mingle with women and children unsupervised. But really, though, we should probably start killing men again, right? When's World War 3, the next forever-war, finally gonna kick off? Which invasion is NATO cooking up next? Which civil war, like in the one-fourth of me's Ukrainian homeland! Can't our men go die there next? Conscription was great--whatever happened to that? Let's bring back the compulsory draft. There are too many useless guys just hangin' around, floating through life like big hairy sacks of shit in the front rows of comedy clubs. As a bonus, we'd solve a lot of the rape issue in Hollywood and elsewhere by *[no one's laughing; Savoy must power through it]* letting NATO instigate another proxy war over dildo polyurethane weapons manufacturing, and adrenochrome human cattle production facilities--yes, I learned about that last one through TikTok videos, thank you very much--could you tell from my "totally bussin' drip" and lack of body mass that I'm a Zoomer?--yeah, let 'em instigate a proxy war and ship every Hulk shirt-wearing, Funko Pop-collecting, DCU weirdo queermo over there so they can finally leave humanity alone. They make me sick--don't you agree? All flabby and dumb and fluoridated and soyinated/fied. I hate them. I think I'd be a good executioner--I really do. I think I'd be fine seeing all their blood and phlegm and pus and shit and cum seep and squirt out of them. Weren't guillotines cool back in the day? Call me the half-nig Marie Antoinette. Or the mulatto Charles Henri-Sanson. Ha HA! Ha ah ah ha! I think that was the executioner guy. I'm the one eating cake and cutting these losers' dicks off. Ha ha! Oops. Sorry. I'm new to this. They

say you're not supposed to laugh at your own jokes. [*flashlight*] Believe it or not, I just got dumped. So funny. By the love of my life, no less. The first non-psy-oped victim war fodder dork I've met in a while. Yep. Ha. Ha. That happened. I got too obsessive. My online femcel/femoid friends on a little known Malaysian basketweaving forum known as Crystal Cafe decided to ruin our love by spreading his info online. Yeah. They harassed him, ordered shit to his house, spammed his friends and family. These, my autistic virtual friends of many years now. Just 'cause I finally found someone. Ha. Ha! Ha ha ha hahahaha. And now he's gone. He he. *[more flashlight waving]* Fuck off! As if growing up with a crackhead mom and deadbeat dad wasn't bad enough, or being abused by my first boyfriend and shunned by my classmates--as if spending my birthdays as a kid blowing out candles in the back of a busted Chevy Caprice when we were sometimes homeless or between government-assisted housing wasn't bad enough, I get this, too. No amount of my silly, retarded SaDGUrLl playlists are gonna save me now! I thought about killing myself the other day, kinda like the victims of those Hollywood perverts--kinda like [redacted] [redacted] did--ho ho! Suicide! What's that, a rope? Pills? Whatcha got there? Johnny just learned to shoot? Already wants to die! Shoot, like a Western--*do these assless chaps make my butt look fat?*--ho ho! [stellar impression, by the way--only partly ripped off from old *Family Guy* episodes.] This is how women are, though, deep down, y'know? Even the fucking pumped-up-Fila-copping, Coachella-going slews. The girls who get all the dick they could ever want and who can't love past the third.

Even most of my supposed foid friends, they could have guys, too. Super-hot ones. I mean, who couldn't Zendaya or Anna Joy Taylor or whomever fuck in a washroom if they wanted to? Who's gonna say no? But it's the same goes for the average girl. I get *one* hot guy and they flame me. I have more hair on my legs than King Kong with a minoxidil prescription. It's not like I get these chances often. I'm like a short, black Amy Schumer--the only thing worse than that is being the actual Amy Schumer. And not 'cause she's a [redacted]--I'm nowhere near as connected as her. My uncle isn't a political gremlin like Chuck Schumer. Mine killed himself. Ha Ha! *[flashing intensifies; Savoy grabs the mic and strides boldly]* So I had my Robert Pattinson X Zoë Kravitz moment stolen from me, and now I'm more like Arthur Fleck in 2019's *Joker* (LOVE IT SO MUCH), having a schizo moment 'cause it's like in the movie when Arthur realizes his lightskin kween gf never existed, but, obviously, the races are reversed, and I'm (semi-)obviously her--though, not as much so as I'd like. Ha--not a guy, and now I really wanna kill Murray, if Murray is all of the dudes out there, and also all of the bimbos, and also God, I guess. So all I have left is comedy now: my everything is gone; my friends are gone; my online community's still there, but I hate it. My school sucks; my job's fucking gay--don't get me started--I'll do my next set on that. Ha ha!--Wow, that's bright *[Savoy hardly registers the light anymore. The people have scared expressions. Savoy Matviyenko's winning?]* My body's also weirder than ever, as you can probably SEE. Every time I get up, it feels like I'm gonna pass OUT. I see

nothing but black--probably anemic. Ha!!! Hahaaaa!haha! And no one will ever love me again. The world's super gay and weird and political and all I know is that I'm glad I'm not in Hollywood or the film industry--pedo rings--'cause I don't even think those pedophiles would traffic or molest me 'cause, really, I'M SO UG------
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CUT TO:

IV

82
The Real Funhouse

"Live to the point of tears."
—— Albert Camus

Being committed—instead of charged with hate-speech-related crimes, after someone in the *ungrateful* audience at your impromptu comedy special *calls the police*, and the authorities give you the choice of seeking psychiatric help or being arrested—isn't as dramatic as you might think.

It's decidedly less cinematic.

The hospital does not have a portico, is not made of brick, and does not hide secret schizo gulags. (It's a hunk of wood and glass and gyprock you remember well—Red Fish Healing Centre.)

No team of menacing (ㅋ̈ ㅋ̈ ㅋ̈ ㅋ̈) doctors and blank-faced nurses in all white welcomes you at the door and immediately straps you down to bed so you can't escape. (You arrive escorted by police and wait by the reception window until you draw an employee's attention.)

No instantaneous interrogation about hallucinations, accusations of psychological impropriety, or disregard of all comments or protestations to the contrary.[159]

No nebulous description of when you *might* get to leave—*if you behave and be a good girl and take all your medicine*. If anything, they try to turn you away, as your responses, if they're accurate, indicate a lack of definitive mental unwellness, but the police insist they take you so that you don't have to face jail time, so they agree to admit you for one week for further evaluation. As the cops hand you over, you thank officers Park and Hughes for being

[159] In fact, it's all been streamlined in the form of a digital questionnaire you can complete on one of their tablets. You hover over the baseball diamond-sized "Prior Conditions" section, consider checking "Depression" and "PTSD," but settle on "Other" and write in "Really idiotic; great sense of humour." You list no medications. You have no emergency contacts (Dax wouldn't be bothered to come if they did call him). You don't care if they use your personal information for research or marketing purposes. You have no dependents anymore.

"gigachad buddy cop all-stars like from *The Other Guys*, which was funny back in the day."

No stripping, no hose-down, no straitjackets. As a rule, you don't need to change clothes and can wear your usual street apparel, but in this case, your clown outfit—including your black stick-on ball nose, bolo tie, and key necklace—are taken in for safekeeping and you're provided with a comfort-fit cotton shirt-pant ensemble in lavender purple, which they will wash once per day for you. Your phone is requested (they cannot legally seize it from you). The intake nurse says she can ask around to see if any of the other nurses have makeup remover to get your heavy foundation off.

No endless row of cells with one or two supervised common areas. No lobotomized patients being wheeled around as you're taken to your room. The facility features green spaces and ecologically responsible architecture, has a gym for guest use, and eight common areas for patients to socialize or entertain themselves in. Depending on your individual case, you may be granted access to the gym, or full access to roam the Riverside grounds outside of scheduled treatment times, so long as you return by curfew at 10:00 PM.

No creaky cot and hole-in-the-ground or foldout wall toilet in your jailcell.[160]

No random nurse or doctor appearances. No vanishing of help in times of need.[161]

No shitty gruel.[162]

No psychotic roommate you find in the corner after the intake nurse leaves.[163]

[160] You get a serviceable single bed with an extra blanket in the closet if needed. A private adjoining washroom. Painted walls and laminate flooring.

[161] Nurses will come by at 8:00 AM to check on you, after which, you may return to bed if you have no scheduled treatment. Nurses may be reached at any time of night by pressing the red button beside the bed.

[162] Mealtimes are 8:00 AM, 2:00 PM, and 7:00 PM, and the kitchen can accommodate any food allergies you may have. And snacks are available whenever.

[163] You're alone.

83

One Flew East, One Flew West

Regardless of the centre's abnormally considerate policies, I'm determined to transform this into a clandestine *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* scenario. (I'm Jack Nicholson/Randle McMurphy, obvs 💪😏.)

A sunny nurse knocked and let herself into my room a smidge after 8:00 AM to notify me that I had a scheduled assessment at 10:00 AM with Dr. Ramona Holtz-Ramirez. I was free to return to bed until then, or engage in morning activities, such as mindfulness yoga or adult colouring. She could show me where my quadrant's (B's) primary activity space was.

I chose bed.

She left behind a tray of scrambled eggs, brown toast, a sliced orange, two pieces of bacon, and some pre- and probiotic yogurt.

I'd arrived so late the night before that I hadn't had time to get my bearings. Having neglected to ask for any food, I had to drink water from the tap in the sterilized washroom and chew on my blanket until it was soggy and then suck up the saliva on/in it to simulate the eating experience. Sleeping had not been easy.

When she excused herself, I flew at the tray, launching it off the nightstand she'd placed it on. The eggs scattered onto the bed. I ate them anyway, foregoing the eco-friendly utensils.

Satiated, I stared out the window. My room was positioned to face southeast. I had a view of the highway and some of the taller trees of the park, in the direction of Crease Clinic, where they were probably filming the latest *Godzilla* movie, in which he's now a grandfather dinosaur and must come out of retirement to fight Alien *and* Predator, who've put aside their differences—and to get back in shape, Godzilla is trained *Rocky III*-style by King Kong, who's also a grandfather now. I don't fucking know anymore. They've made 30 of those. At least one of them was partly filmed there. Read about it online.

One can only spend so much time inventing new monster movies before they must move onto other more engaging enterprises. I made my way out to B's

activity room on the ground floor, after getting lost and wandering down some hallways with other patient rooms and therapy spaces.

No one was playing cards, looking at *Playboy*s, smoking cigarettes. They were sifting through Crayola boxes, reading home decor magazines, doing *breathing exercises*.

Still, my Billy Bibbit was around here somewhere. My Charlie Cheswick. My Martini (Danny DeVito's character). My "Chief" Bromden. The whole lot. I was going to catch them trading pen crayons, pull up a chair, swap those suckers out for John Players, and change their lives around. Yeah. It was gonna be swell.

And the staff was gonna try to put the kibosh on it after seeing we were healing @SigmaxSavoy's way. They were going to lobotomize me, put one of those magnet helmets on me that's supposed to treat depression, but really robs you of your piety and fear instincts, and I was going to come back a normie, and this was going to motivate "Chief"[164] to ultimately overcome his demons and hurl the totem pole through the window of the activity room/adult jungle gym and escape with the rest of the gang.

Instead, everyone seemed content to twist themselves into Balasana (the one where you suck yourself off from a kneeling position) and colour inside the lines.

I did push-ups in the corner and drummed with my fingers on the epoxy flooring for a bit, until one of the nurses approached and asked me to come with her to my appointment.

The venerable Dr. Ramona Holtz-Ramirez.

She had some degrees on the wall (from my old university!!! Haa Ha! HA! Of course!), a couple bookcases with academic versions of the self-help books in Robot Counsellor Woman's office. Some Indigenous wood carvings of salmon (🐟). An Indigenous blanket pinned up above her desk. A Rothko print of four or five reds (🔴🖼️). Chairs of different colours and styles scattered around the room. A Juniper bonsai that looked young—a gift in all likelihood, because if she knew anything, she'd understand it's an outdoor bonsai that should only be brought inside during the winter months, and even then, putting a burlap sack over it and leaving it outside is preferable, as bringing it inside for too long can disrupt its hibernation. Could such a person be trusted? I certainly thought not, but this was mandatory, hard time in the Dick Falino's Ha Ha Jailhouse for me.

[164] Not mentally ill but addicted to oxy in this scenario.

She introduced herself, told me to sit wherever I wanted (I picked the black chair in the far corner), asked how I was doing, if I knew why I was here.

"Well, duh."

She'd been given a briefing by the arresting officers as to what happened at Mr. Cockie's and saw it necessary to conduct a psychiatric evaluation on me to gain a better sense of the situation.

"You don't have to have me do a Rorschach Test—all I'll see are chads and virgins or Japanese monsters from the manga I like."

She said those weren't done anymore.

"Psychology was cooler when it was mystical premonitions and head-drilling. There's no mystique to a neurotransmitter, no ātman inside a myelin sheath."

She said she found that interesting. She was going to order some bloodwork and interview me to start a record of family history of psychological distress, determine recent school and work performance; assess basic cognition, chart out symptom pathology, so on and so on.

"Take as much of my blood as you want. I don't need it."

She jotted something down and thanked me for consenting. The blood would be drawn after the interview. She asked me where I wanted to start.

I started at the flight to Edmonton and went up to my arrival at Red Fish. I was as straightforward and direct as I could manage; offered only required background details, such as some context for Crystal Cafe. To avoid wasting too much of her time, I kept my descriptions of Avery's massive, succulent arms, easily one of his best features, to a modest two or three sentences. The whole time, she scribbled things on her notepad (at least *that* hadn't been digitized).

When I was done, she told me she'd need an hour to review her notes. She said I could get my bloodwork done in the meantime.

When I showed back up with a smiley-face sticker on the crook of my left elbow, she sat me down in one of the chairs in her office and thanked me for being so forthcoming with her earlier.

"You got it, chica."

She informed me that, in her clinical estimation, I had [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] (likely from early-life abuse), [redacted], [redacted] (many expressions), [redacted], [redacted] (which I already knew about), [redacted] (which I also already knew about), [redacted], [redacted], and elements of [redacted]—*at the very least*.

She remarked it was nothing short of miraculous that I'd been able to make it this far in life with such a combination and limited support. She suggested I start by taking [redacted] and [redacted].

I asked her if I could see a male doctor next time. One who doesn't use R*ddit.

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Thought about jumping from my window, but it wouldn't open.

Dinner wasn't too bad. Grilled cajun chicken breast with mashed potatoes, green beans, and pudding for dessert.

85

Savoyvilization and Its Discontents

I'm summoned to the new doctor's office at 10:00 AM the next morning, after a decent night's rest and another drumming session in the activity room.[165]

He's on the other end of the hall from Dr. Jezebel-Trollop. The nurse knocks and Dr. Thacker opens the door to greet us. Thanks the nurse for bringing me up and asks me to please sit in the drawn-back chair on the "visitors" side of his desk.

His office, in contrast to Dr. Placenta-Uterus', is untidy. It's got four bookshelves. Most of the books are fiction, history, or philosophy. The two filing cabinets are jammed with records and documentation, to the point of spilling out (tempting me to peek at some of the other psychos' charts 📂😝).

[165] They were painting today. No one talked to me except to say hi or nod. The nurse running the main activity asked if I'd like to join. I declined.

A scratched-up acoustic guitar hangs on a wall-mount. On the walls are black-and-white images of a pilot posing beside his ('30s?) aircraft, alongside his team of mechanics, and originals of everything from math-based illustrations to abstract representations of alien landscapes. It smells like McCleod's Bookstore downtown—a university professor's office-type musty—from before he gets tenure, when he still cares about what he does.

I'm fidgeting in my lavender garb. At least the chair's comfy.

"So, Savoy," he says, squinting at the file in front of him with earnest grey eyes. "What brings you in?" Dr. Thacker is "daddy" handsome—trace of stubble, bushy brown hair, athletic build, stark facial definition, resembling Jake Gyllenhaal circa the *Nightcrawler* era. No wonder the nurse giggled when he thanked her.[166]

"Grand larceny, drunk and disorderly conduct" (not far off) "aaaaand possession with intent."

He laughs. "I must say, you have a first-rate rap sheet here. I haven't seen this many diagnoses for someone your age in a while." (🙂🙂🙂) "How does that sit with you?"

"Regular day at the office."

He rambles on about procedural stuff, then asks why I wanted to be transferred to a male doctor.

"I'm a woman—sort of—so I know how we think. A broad would have to be a fucked femoid like me to figure all this out, but even then, with all that's happened, I couldn't trust one of my own—not anymore."

"A broad? *Femoid?*"

"Yeah—you know."

"I *don't* know much about that second term, but 'broad' sounds like something my grandfather would say" *(motions to pilot photo on the wall).*

"Would that be so bad? I'd much rather be living back then. No cellphones. No Twitch. No *Shrek* porn. No fucking rottmaxxing. Lower taxes!"

"I have a feeling those people then wouldn't have seen eye to eye with you, based on skin tone alone."

[166] Then again, everyone thanks everyone else around here for everything. It's a toxic positivity thing.

I somehow gnash my teeth and sigh at the same time. Life is a game of being misunderstood by NPCs and cautious centrists.

"Everyone says stuff like that when I talk about the past or liking Western stuff or white people. Yeah, white people have called me a negro, a baboon, a spear-chucker, a melon-muncher over the years—but they're also the only people who've ever been nice to me. Chinese people hate me. Indian people hate me. South American people hate me. Why is it *always* the same? Why does no one understand that it's not weird for me to not hate white people? Why would I be mad at half of myself, and the only people to show me kindness? They can be bad, and they've made mistakes, but they can also be good."

He does a bit of the eyebrow twitching, touches his cheek, shuffles papers around.

(Do his windows open? I could jump from here and cause serious injury.)

I turn the questions back on him. "Do you believe it—her report?"

"To the extent that I believe she's a competent psychiatrist and wouldn't intentionally deceive you about your maladies, yes."

"I thought you might be different."

"Am I supposed to denounce her for doing her job?"

"No—but. But. Yeah. I guess. I mean, she told me I have all these things, most of which I was already aware of because I spend my time picking at every minute piece of myself, like, like—some sort of theydy Prometheus. Well, it was the buzzards that did that the picking there. But *whatever*. I know I fixate on patterns. I miss details other people notice and move on too quickly and then detect tiny things they miss every time. My life is nothing *but* patterns—everywhere I look, things come back at me against my will, as if I was stuck in a vortex *thing* that wants to kick my ass. I know I fluctuate from avoiding people to being outwardly hostile. I know I over-estimate myself or wildly under-estimate myself. The list goes on. I joke about having autism, but what benefit does it have for me to go through the rest of my life having those technical words assigned to me? Should I make a business card with all of them listed out? A LinkedIn profile where I include them as accomplishments? Our civilization has gone mad with classification. Classification is the first step toward a soul's eradication. So don't do it. Don't give me those labels. If you do, I'll walk out and accept the hate-crime jail time or anything else they want to do to me 'cause I said a couple *heckin'* BAD WORDS on stage. It can't get any worse than this."

He leans forward in his chair and bring the tips of his fingers together.[167]

"Did you know Greek physicians used to give hellebore, a toxic plant, to mental patients, in the hopes that they would vomit out their illnesses? It later became a symbol of ignorance amid 17th-century British physicians. William Johnson, an esteemed doctor, once told Nicholas Culpeper he should use it to purge his brains out for suggesting it as a treatment. How about drilling holes in heads to treat mental illness? They've found evidence of trephination across many ancient societies that wouldn't have had contact with each other, like Ancient China and Pre-Columbus South America. Would you like us to go back to those treatments?"

"Maybe *I would* want to eat a poisonous plant instead of expensive toxic pills from pharmaceutical companies that lobby our governments so they can produce highly addictive petroleum-derived meds that create more issues than they solve *and* cause you to rack up outrageous debt."

"Are you on any medication right now?"

"No."

"I'll have to trust you on that. We don't have your files yet."

(They'll be getting my full medical history? Ohhhh...)

He continues: "Do you want to know where I come down on all of this, Savoy?"

"Yes."

He leans back into a streak of warmth coming in from the window. "I'm somewhere in the middle. Maybe even a touch more on your side. I went through eight years of post-secondary schooling, did the dance. I got to see a fairly full picture of the history of psychological treatment, of our practices, our clinical trials—the whole shebang. Sometimes, I can't fathom the reasoning behind doctors' treatment styles from years ago. But I see in most of what they were doing a desire to discover and a desire to heal—though not as much anymore, not at the higher levels. I've read the reports you're alluding to—I know companies like Pfizer and Novo Nordisk *allegedly* fund organizations like the FDA to make the drug approval process easier. I know about the Rockefeller Foundation's involvement in integrating petroleum into the broader medicinal apparatus through their "takeover" method. I know how often medical trials fail, and how companies fund them looking

[167] Major Gendo Ikari vibes.

for a particular result, not *any result*. But while I'm aware of all this, and it did make me consider leaving this profession at times, because short of taking a gun to a pharma head's house, or doing what you did up on stage, ranting about the reforms that need to take place, I have to remain in this profession. To stop it from becoming a procession of diagnoses devoid of sympathy and ethics, leading straight to the pharmacy every time. Believe it or not, I have seen people use some of these medications to rescue themselves from unbelievable pits. Pits far deeper and wider than yours might feel at this very moment. They can work, but with the right program, and the right mentality. I wish we could give the pure extracts to people, but those have largely been outlawed. I'm sorry if my colleague made you feel you might need 'Big Pharma' medications or treatments in order to be a functional person going forward. That's not the approach someone more independent like you needs. But I urge you to be open to whatever treatment I may prescribe. You need assistance. Trust that I will recommend it with good intentions. Do you read me?"

"I do." (What other choice do I have? This is the best offer.)

"Good. That's the only way this works. So, can we start again?"

I stay for another hour and mostly chat about things unrelated to the file while fiddling with the items on his desk and swinging my feet around: my weird commissions, my first few poems, hilariously bad comedy specials like Brendan Schaub's *Gringo Papi*, my prolonged war of attrition (staring contest) with one of the herons down at the inlet.

I ask about his wife, Sage, and whether or not he has kids. He doesn't, but they're planning on starting a family when she finishes her Master of Science. He recounts a trip they took to the airfields in England. It sounded peaceful. Really peaceful.

His first prescription: join in on the next group activity.

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Savoy Joins the (Recovery) Battle! 💪

The next day, I cobble together the resolve to join in on the morning's arts and crafts.

Still munching on my English muffin from the breakfast tray, I hover around the edges of the activity tables, side-eyeing my fellow inmates/volunteers/unfortunates, peeking at their creations.

They're making pipe-cleaner art pieces—Elmer's glue and shit. Glitter jars and paint sets poised to go so they can mix medias once they're done affixing the fuzzy pieces.

Eventually, the nurse leading the activity asks if I'd like to get involved. I clench my fists and say yes. She puts me at a table with an escort-hot woman in her 40s, and heavy-set man in his 50s, and another skinny man who might be 35. They acknowledge me with the same sheepish nods you give other patients waiting in a doctor's office lobby. The nurse hands me a blank piece of construction paper and points me toward the closest glue bottle. This must be what our tax dollars are going towards—every colour of pipe cleaner in existence is represented. Skinny man is fastening them together to represent a pride flag (Dale Harding, from *Cuckoo's Nest?)*. The woman is forming a heart and coating it in glitter (Candy Starr?). The other is constructing a teepee, glueing its base to the page for structural support (Chief Bromden?).

The nurse (Ratched) instructs me to make something that brings me joy 🌻.

It takes some thinking. I could very well put together an Avery figure on the spot. (Thoughts of him are starting to flood in now that the high from Dick Falino's is wearing off.) But I don't want to start crying. A damaged CPU would be too hard. Maybe a flower? Too expected. I'd be like Candy if I did that. McMurphy wanted everyone to be free. What would he do?

Clouds.

With nothing better to do and nothing to lose, I pick up every white pipe-cleaner from the tray and begin forming as many clouds as possible, layering them within each other to create a Junji Ito/Shuzo Oshimi spiral aesthetic.

Thoughts of nothing else for the whole hour.

Upon finishing, I revert back to thinking about Avery and whether or not he's read through those archived CC thread links yet. Archives are like clouds. The ominous kind. Storm clouds. The kind that want to tear you down after you spend years as part of their "epic" clandestine online club. The ones you thought you could trust. I wonder what Avery would have made. What he would think of the small talk, the garbs, the drumming. I want to know his thoughts on everything, down to the smallest detail.

I'm supposed to see Dr. Thacker every morning at 11:00 AM, except for Sundays and every other Saturday (he moved it back an hour so I could sleep more because of my insomnia, but something about being mandated to wake up early is agreeing with me).

Maybe I'll tell Doc about my creepypasta phase today. I should ask for outside privileges. Don't know why I haven't yet.

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Found Out

"You lied to me, Savoy," he scorns from behind his desk. "It says here you were taking Dextroamphetamine...10 milligram tablets. Is that why you look so clammy today?"

"What? No!"

"Are you feeling irritable at all? Fatigued?"

"No, no, no. I feel fine."[168]

He asks if I abused them, and why I failed to mention all this in the initial evaluation. I tell him I don't abuse them (I don't think I do), that I only took them because they were prescribed by my old GP when I started university, that he said it would help me study because my mind tends to race.

Steam's drifting up from his takeout coffee. Drizzly day. Threatening to become downpour.

"You can trust me, Doc. I promise. *Promise*, promise." I'm white-knuckling the chair. "Why does it always have to go like this? Why do the people who

[168] Not true, but I really tapered off the dex after the mushroom/dex/no sleep/seppuku incident. I only took a couple for the comedy show so I could be dialed in. Locked in. Jelquin' it. Jorkin' it. Flushed them afterward.

say they're going to help me or be there always do this as soon as I open up! I'm sorry. Please don't leave me. Please. Look—ARGH!—if I get on the floor and beg..."

"Savoy, hey...I'm not going to leave you. You don't have to get on the floor and perform a *dogeza*. Stay in your seat for now. I'd be horrible at my job if I abandoned my patients for lying to me once. Some of the addicts I deal with—I'm not saying you are one—lie to my face every time they see me. I know it. They know I know it. Yet they still do it. Treatment only works if you buy in and come at it with an open heart. Like what we discussed last time. Don't lie to me—don't make this a habit. It'll hurt you in the end, not me."

"So let me get this straight: You won't leave, or report me, or beat me up, or throw me in foster care, or doxx me, or have me perma-committed?"

"Correct. Besides, you're too old for foster care."

"And you're not lying, or planning a double-cross where you lull emotionally-stunted forum-girlie freaks into a false sense of security and then expose their secrets through your YouTube channel?"

"I use YouTube strictly to watch documentaries."

"And you won't care if I tell you nothing but gruesome, spine-crushing details about my life—details that haunt and beleaguer my every second? Ones that threaten to tear at the fabric of my essence, ones that come from my most wounded parts?"

"I'm here to listen."

I leap out of the comfy chair and spin around in the open space in front of the bookshelf. Dr. Thacker sips more of his coffee and motions me back toward the desk.

"One more question. This might be a bad time," I say, gearing up to play "Smells Like Teen Spirit" on the side of his desk, "but can I have outside privileges? I'm doing my best to participate in activities—I made Junji Ito pipe-cleaner clouds today. But without my freak pills, and without stuff to draw or write with, I don't have much to do between activities. I was trying to write poems every day before...*you-know-what* happened. I was learning a lot about grammar so I could make my poems and texts make more sense. Now, I'm kind of stuck. I try not to cry in my room because everyone is nice here, but there's someone I miss very badly. And the grounds here have a special significance to us. Because of...because of..."

"If you tell me why these grounds are significant to you, I'll consider it."

"Yes! Thank you! So—"

88

Foster Care

My first core memory is of a snow globe. No, I'm not Charles Foster Kane.[169] Specifically, it's of the snow globe in my third foster family's home, in Calgary. It had a gingerbread house in it, surrounded by a miniature gingerbread family. It was likely on the tacky side—filled with gaudy Christmas accents.

I remember reaching my grubby little four-year-old hands out for it as it sat upon the living room coffee table. I remember crying when my foster mom, Tanya, took it away. The crying in those days was constant, and it was, according to Nana, who once or twice has filled me in on those days over the phone, the main reason behind my being moved around so much within the system. I couldn't stop calling out for Janice. Sometimes, I'd ask for Winston. Giving the snow globe back to me stopped the crying, so Tanya soon learned to give it to me whenever I wanted it.

There isn't much you can do with a snow globe, granted. They don't work like footballs or hula hoops. All I could do was stare at it, shake it so the white bits meant to be snow would swirl around, or twist the black knob on its side and listen to the short vibraphone melody. The tone was sharp and rattly, pinging to the ears. The melody: Mozart-lite. When the snow swirled and the melody played at the same time, the gingerbread family inside seemed happy. Happy, brown, and together.

I'd put the snow globe on a pillow and try to slosh the snow into every part of the globe. Or, I'd try to get it all over to one side. Or, I'd balance it upside down and watch the snow collect above the family's heads.

The snow globe got to go outside, watch the other children play, wade into the bushes, come into the bathroom, sleep beside me. If I didn't know where it was, I'd be bawling again.

Snow, snow. The family inside was happy. My mommy and daddy were sometimes like that. We were sometimes like that. I turned the knob so many times that the melody began to buckle and skip notes.

[169] We're still in *Cuckoo's Nest.*

After a few months, I saw that Janice wasn't coming back for me.

Tanya, with her age spots and lunch-lady arms, stopped telling me it was a matter of time. She wanted me to make more of an effort to get to know my foster brothers and sisters (whose names I hadn't bothered to learn), if I was going to stay.

At that point, even the snow globe's presence couldn't stop me from crying. I wouldn't watch TV with the other kids. I wouldn't take the snow globe outside anymore. I was always served last at dinner and sat at the far end of the table.

The landline was in the kitchen (grease-veneered with ugly diamond-patterned linoleum), where Tanya'd spend most of her time because she was constantly cooking for us. I'd see Tanya speaking on the phone to someone, and it was bad if she looked at me while talking. I knew she was talking about me. Sometimes, I'd hear my name.

The only way to get my family back, to reunite with Janice and Winston, my gingerbread family, was to free them from the snow globe. Janice and Winston were in there the whole time! How could I not have known? I'd break it, and then, they'd grow in size and finally be free and be my parents again (!), like in the cartoons where characters would be shrunken down and trapped somewhere and would need to be rescued. Like in *George Shrinks!*

The highest point in the foster house was the big bedroom on the second floor, where the older children slept. It had a window that faced the backyard, and under it was a patch of concrete where the kids sometimes drew in chalk.

One day, when we were eating cold Alphagettis for lunch, Tanya got on the phone again, and she was looking right at me. She seemed sad. I was sad. The decision was made. I grabbed my globe, excused myself from the dining room table, and made my way up to the room. The window was supposed to be closed, but I'd seen the boys open it a few times—the latch was at the bottom of the window. It was easy to open. I grabbed a chair to boost myself onto the windowsill. I checked to see if anyone was below. No one.

I shook the globe one last time so the snow was everywhere. You could hardly see the gingerbread family through the blizzard. I twisted the knob. The tune groaned and chirped. *Ting, ding, ding, da ding!* We were gonna be a family again!

I turned the globe upside down so the glass would hit the ground first. It did. Shattered like a water balloon on the chalk drawings, darkening the lines and spreading glass in every direction.

Without putting on shoes, I ran down as fast as I could and surveyed the area.

The base of the globe lay in two, one piece pressed right against the foundation of the house. The other was a few feet away in the opposite direction. The melody had stopped. Bits of snow had splattered onto the concrete and mixed in with the chalk. The gingerbread family was resting in the first square of a hopscotch grid. They didn't move. I picked up the father, but he'd lost his leg, and he wasn't vibrating or growing or anything. The child wasn't moving either. I picked up the mom and shook her to see if she needed to be activated. Nothing. I tried holding the three of them together. Nothing. I put her back on a piece of broken glass. Nothing. I covered her in snow. I swung her. I kissed her. I dashed her against the ground as hard as I could. I stomped on her. I punched her. I cried onto her. Nothing.

I didn't see anyone around.

Janice wasn't coming back. Winston wasn't coming back. This was it.

Tanya came running out thereafter. In my panic, I stepped backward onto a piece of glass that lodged in my foot.

One hospital trip, a couple phone calls, and a few more bowls of cold Alphaghettis later, I was shipped off to foster home number four.

89

Not a Liar (Please Believe Me!)

I'm not a liar by nature. Not even *close*. I may have thousands of faults, according to Doctor Ovary-Fallopian or Damon Liar (who would know a LIAR if he saw one! 🤢)—but I don't count myself as a fibber.

Somehow I've managed to lie to Doctor Thacker twice already. Before not coming clean about my dex use, I snuck out to the grounds, after the bloodwork Fallopian ordered.

I did it because from the moment I was escorted through the sliding-door entrance by those officers, I'd started replaying in my head the day I'd spent here on the compound with Avery. I always replay our dates in my head when I need a pick-me-up, but now it was sudden and inexorable. And the pining got stronger as the hours passed. So I snuck out.

Today, though. Having been granted the pasture, I take my hooves up along the exact route I walked before meeting up with Avery that day. The chills and hot flashes make it hard to keep up with the mounting early-May warmth. I'm sweating through my lavender jumpsuit. Have to stop in the shade of Crease and heave.

The right lane heading southbound on Lougheed is blocked off for road maintenance. Traffic has become backed up. The motorists aren't happy. From the steps of Crease, their cars are visible. Several of them are doing the "annoyed driver" pose, where they prop their left elbows up on the driver-side door panel and rest their heads in their palms. Some are eating. Some are texting. Some have two hands on the wheel and stare blankly forward. One has his head out the window, his long hair spilling down the side of his car, and is staring up at the sky.

I can't stop crying.

It takes me 20 minutes to stand up. I see some very muddled patients by the cottages. Nurses are escorting them as they swat at butterflies (no exaggeration), wander in broken circles, or stand, just stand, on the sidewalks.[170]

With tears in eyes, I walk towards the swaying oaks, and then up to the Lawn buildings, my main destination. I can't get into the West Lawn building on my own, so instead I sit by the barred front door and let my eyes fall over the landing's tapestry of cracks and bruises: the mold culture in every crack, foundational damage no one will ever receive the money for or have the care to fix. We're just gonna let this place die, aren't we? Avery would know what I mean.

These thoughts gradually fade, and I hit the state. You might be familiar with it. Where you get too tired to think, too tired to categorize or indemnify. Matter returns to matter. The fissure in the support column in front of you divests itself of symbolism and reverts to smoothed out, manicured stone, no better than the pieces that were stripped off in its making. The wrought-iron gate: a raw slab of iron ore. Slab *qua* slab. The dust on the floor where you sit: a chance gathering of unrelated particles.

You see what's in front of you. It's there.

But your life would be the same if it wasn't. Everything could all fall straight to the core of the earth and you wouldn't so much as register it.

[170] It's giving post-lobotomy McMurphy 🫶✨ *Yaaaas!*

You can go a lifetime like this.

You need only stop trying, caring. Join the race. Don't think. Move, occasionally.

Time will keep moving.

I'd make a joke here about this being a proto form of rottmaxxing, the rottmaxxing of Diogenes in the Anthropocene. But this appears in half form to me and scatters like a plume of exhaust waved away.

I sit a while and cry. Weep.

Don't care who sees me.

90

The Elements of Depression

Doctor Thacker gifts me a black Moleskine notebook and a pen. He asks me to write a few poems over the next few days to express how I'm feeling—about love, my family, everything. They don't have to be perfect, he says—he's not a poet and won't be judging their literary merit. He wants me to access some of the parts of myself that are in pain.

He also gives me his copy of *The Elements of Style* he used when he was an undergraduate. ("Because you said you were keen to improve your grammar.") The margin notes he made remain.

Still participating in the activities. I've hung around enough now that Chief and the others will ask me how I'm doing,[171] but these temporary occupations of meditation, Legos, Pilates aren't doing the trick. And they're over before they start. And then I'm right back to shelling up. Right back to wandering over to West Lawn.

I read the book front-to-back three times my first day with it. It contains a lot of material I missed in school. The co-writer, E. B. White, also wrote *Charlotte's Web.* That was one of the only books Janice ever bought me as a kid. I recall hating Fern, the little girl, for losing interest in Wilbur, Charlotte, and the rest of the animals as she grew up. She threw them to the side so she could spend time with Henry Fussy and the other boys in her class. How could she be so blind to the miracle taking place in front of her?

[171] I'm starting to think they're regular people.

I take *The Elements of Style* and my notebook with me each day to complete what has now become The Circuit of Tears. I've introduced a slight variation where I sometimes visit the graveyard on top of the hill and talk to the deceased. I pretend some of them are cool pioneers, who travelled the seas to settle new lands and wear fur pelts, like the ones buried in Fort Langley. Or the animals from *Charlotte's Web*. Or the Sisyphuses, whom I pray aren't lonely and haven't been dug up. No one answers.

91

For Sale: Waifu Maid Outfit: Never Used / (Atomized)

Every day for a week, Dr. Thacker has asked for a status update, whether I spent as much time outside as the day before, etc. When I tell him I went to the graveyard again, he says that's a macabre spot, asks if it's good for me to hang out there so often. (Everywhere's a graveyard. We just don't label most portions.) Asks if I completed the requested activities. Asks about my withdrawal symptoms. Today he asks if the book he lent me was helpful, and I tell him that I've learned a lot about grammar and punctuation (that I use a ton of filler words, for example), that I've been trying some of it out. He asks to see what I've done, so I slide my notebook over.

"If you flip to the last two pages, you'll find the best poems.[172] I rewrote them because the earlier versions had mistakes. I think I'm improving. Don't mind the doodles."

---

[172] *[poems included]:*

nous sommes riches

the duolingo ai intones
nous sommes riches
perhaps *vous*
but not me, see:
I'm living paycheck to
thought-of-paycheck
drinking tap water and lucid dreams

the internet has made this cultural exploration
(relatively) free *donc*
tu peut-etre le vrai to say
—

[poems continued]

but mine comes directly from the teat
of transistors and silicon
and must be allowed to load

dit-moi my dear cybernetic Virgil
mon papa des linguistics (Avery)
will it ever get better
will I ever get to speak
the *lingua franca*
of the free?

*

th' uh the

n' there is the the
& the not the & the uh the

f'r all the told guh ee be seen th' the the n' ambn't be tellin' nu'un
but it there in 'nside & o'tside

but n'w the buh be diffren't cuh da ppl be no-lifein' lot n' be
gettin' takin' away in da wheel metuls

m'ma use say no "talkn abo th' gov n men the or make wet eye
wah chur skreen n'stid be ez r" n' i cood

onlee when eyes make close and dark dark make mode ee see thing from
not the screen ee think ppl look uh ee think ppl look s s s suh ad? (wet eye!)
this make ee no want take p'll no want l'stin gov no want thumb screen

buh you come werk the say this the onlee the the no the else n' more be h'ppy ih n'
this all
never no uther the do as t'ld take p'll n' l'sten

n' ee no want ee want l've see ppl like th' the the n'
you force p'll n' ee f'nlly see
this ee hurt

*

loli waifu nyah!

dog, it ain't even about that, tho. i don't even know how to express it,
but, like, Megumi-chan just gets me in a way no other woman has before;
she understands my needs and isn't afraid to fulfill them (;)) in ways those
3D whores never could, and would you just look at how cute she is! she lets
me change her into three separate outfits (saving up for the dlc outfits rn)—
my parents don't really get it; my dad called me a "mentally damaged freak"

[poems continued]

and told me to get back with that 3D bitch, Scarlet—you remember her—
'cause he wants grandkids or a non-disappointment or something selfish,
it's whatever. anyway, dude, Megumi's great, and life's never been better—
oh, it's almost time for me to feed her. would you wanna stay for dinner?

*

my funeral v8

i know you're eager to see me go
so before i do i'd like your help with planning the affair
choose a nice venue not one of those stodgy funeral homes
with the foldable chairs and the rheum-stained pews maybe
something outside under oak trees or i know
arbutuses yeah they're rare and all but try please
don't have me embalmed that's just degrading i'll
still be young so i won't rot as quickly as the others just
put me on a boat and light me on fire viking style
but wait the arbutuses okay bring the boat ashore first
call the fire department and clear it with them or don't good
scroll through my contacts and invite any of the names that look fun
don't get discouraged at the lack of replies or crying-laughing emojis you
get back [they're not an insult to either of us]
wear something spiffy one of your goth bitch fits with a victorian veil (it's
in the budget) it'll scare my parents a little but they'll survive and
for the catering give 'em something eclectic chicken burgers and
moroccan fusion maybe everyone gets an eggs bennie and a goodie bag of
polaroids and poems to take home that's good yeah
and the music the music will be key make it
emotional bumper cars start with viper or some heinous meme rap hit
'em with the liszt next give 'em some '90s ballads in between then
round it off with some garish boomer rock metal scratch that the
drive soundtrack scratch that russian doomer synthwave they'll love it
it'll drown out the crickets you can hire a craigslist dj perfect and and
i know i've asked a lot with this and you've been great but
if i could ask one last thing could you say a few words make
them fancy or biblical or crude or resentful or make them whatever it takes
to show the ones who turn up that there were shades to this that
this life we spent together wasn't lived in the interstices that it wasn't only spent
in the way

*

[poems continued]

uni

4 years obsequious starring
every trash brain in the area
(5½ on average):
jars like *futurama* heads filling
every lecture hall hallway throughway
except this one's not nixon
preserved for 1000 years;
it's jacob from your old math 11 class
(didn't talk to him other than when
you handed out worksheets): wait, nixon's
teaching this class – jk –
it's just a researcher w/ a big nose:
actually, he's not here in person – it's
just a canvas screen and video the TA
set up: by the TA you saw buying shattered
edibles at the BURB dispensary last week.
TA humming a tune by indie artist x
that sounds like it belongs in a Netflix movie.
the heads are getting restless: you accidentally
drop a chocolate chip granola bar in one's
jar and move seats instead of retrieving it.
some stop typing when they fall asleep.
the TA's jar water should be boiling.
you're drinking mineral water. you spill some
into the jar beside you in your new spot and the head inside
wakes up. dominic (according to his name plate)
looks confused. the professor is talking
about voting now. you think the lecture hasn't
started yet. it's been going on for 2 hours.
you're not even sure this is the right class?
you're here for 5½ years. slides
have been put up. the homework is to
lick the glass in front of you.
(it's really a ceiling.)

*

This is maging me hongry! 😓

Hoah...
so...
hongry...
commershial (15 segs)
hits for

[poems continued]

garlic ba-con
spicy mayo
mayo sweet
Whopp-Macger
(caus whas better
than baygon than
moar baygon??)
an dad starts-ded
scratchin is belly-like
all "yea, wanna
try tha
one
godda coupon
inna mail
lass week"
an i jus
see outsie that
kitchin winna
a guy who
like all
coupon-y but
a person
towin a wagin
an if he
was in here
he probableee
be hongre too
maybe we
invide him
in he gan
look at Whopp-Gar
drool @ baygeun
w/ us two he
migh like
that aan
finalee be
full the
world
gould will'd
ead food
an be
full.

*

[poems continued]

wageslave

jim
jim

Hi, monke
jim, back in the cagie

Yes but

What lolololololol
in and u wanted?

No
Good.

———

*

mall (nostalgia/matthew days)

lost——(virginity—) & found
shopping annex confutatis XXX
01 gr8 speckled deific gyprock & tile
found 's wave j'ested d'food coeurt
at opening HOT TOPIC waves th'
rong fountain primo play p– o n e kiddies
teens $ 1 un split mall- rat- rat rats marbled
brick & mortar prizzzmatic senioroids qualum kal-
eidoscope 1,000 swatterings o' corpo slogan/mantra/
deal/neon/pop-up but w/ warmth waft o' cinnamon pre-
late- stage maledictus sans (x.) the capitalisme machismo ississi-
mo fluorescence so fluorescence to stay on in us all to stay in on

He flips. While he reads, I poke around his office, hoping to learn a thing or two more about Doc. His bookshelf is harder to understand than Avery's. *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, The Decline of the West, Medea* (makes me think of Tyler Perry), *The Ego and Its Own, The Red Book*. Haven't heard of a single one. The shelves also display memorabilia—wood blocks from Japan, a Bhutanese penis sculpture,[173] a hand-painted box he tells me is Hungarian when he sees me looking at it, a Peruvian mitten made from alpaca fur. The drawings and paintings *are* originals. For some of them, he forgot to remove the hand-written prices. In most cases this would be a rookie error, but it fits here.

I wonder if he has any pets, like Mr. Clemence. Maybe Mr. C's his dad. The man in the airplane picture smiles on.

"These poems," he says, "are sprightly and inventive. Yet, not one of them deals with what I wanted you to write about."

I clomp back to the desk. "Oh. So I kinda—"

"Made a joke of it? I recognize that you like to do that as a means of dealing with difficult emotions and covering up how you feel deep down about what's happened to you—I get it. But you don't break through by retreating into layers of humour and anger. Nothing will change that way."

"I tried to follow your directive, but I'd start crying again and nothing would come out except sappy cringe lines. I only want to write about Avery."

"You've mentioned him many times in our recent sessions. You said you went on a total of four dates? Do you feel you developed a healthy love for him?"

"Yes."

"I'm not saying this is *you*, but sometimes I see patients who've grown up in neglectful homes latch onto partners later in life. They develop less-than-ideal attachments. Do you feel you might've done this here—just a tad? With the so-called 'courting'?

"No."

"As a husband myself—it's not always easy to love someone the way they deserve if we haven't yet dealt with our own sources of emotional insecurities. You can't love someone authentically from a state of flux, no matter how hard

[173] Saw this referenced on CC once as an alarming example of moidbrain cultural domination.

you'd like to will it. In his *Symposium*, Plato suggests that genuine love is the beginning of a joint jour—"

"Do you want to know how it feels being without him? Do you?"

"I do, Savoy. I want you to acknowledge it."

"I like to think someone's attached a jigsaw to my entrails. Every time I move, every time I breathe, the serrated edges cut deeper. It's the aftertaste of a tulip collapsing in on itself. It hurts so much I can barely stand it. I want to rip my hair out, stab myself to try to excise whatever's in there. Whenever I love, it shreds from the inside out. Crying doesn't make it feel any better. I get light-headed and have to drink water. The pain is so cavernous and immeasurable and draining that it doesn't even make me want to kill myself—I joke about it, and I tried—I barely remember how I survived, *why* I swam for shore instead of letting things happen—but the real sensation, what you *actually feel* in the end when you love someone, when you're like me, someone as invisible and spiteful as me, is whirling, agonizing nothingness. You can't bring yourself to do anything about it, but you *want* it to hurt so bad that one day it ends you on the spot. You want love to be the end of you, and you want at least one other person in this world to understand what you went through for it."

"Now we're getting somewhere." He hands me a tissue so I stop rubbing my dripping nose and tears on my top. "This is good. We can work with this. Let yourself feel."

I can't respond.

"I'm going to recommend that you stay here an extra week, okay? I know this was meant to be a one-week thing, but I feel it would be a great service to yourself to allow us to monitor you a little while longer. We're just scratching the surface. How does that sound to you?"

I blubber something about wanting a sip of his coffee.

92

Breakfast.

Activity.

Cry.

Session.

Lunch.

(Cry w/ side of cry.)

Outside.

Cry.

Dinner.

Cry.

Activity.

Cry.

(Joys...)

93

The first half of the next week passes slowly. I've read *The Elements of Style* 35 times. I could explain basic grammar to a pigeon and get it to write a tight paragraph.

It's like that episode of *Family Guy* where Cleveland and Quagmire end up locked in Peter's basement and are subjected to a DIRECTV promo on repeat, and they memorize it so thoroughly they can quote every second of it in perfect unison.[174]

[174] Coming out as a *Family Guy* fan in the current year hasn't been easy.

I've scared away many tourists and visitors from West Lawn. The construction on Lougheed is done. Traffic is still bad. The long-termers in the cottages are still fucked.

I half-heartedly asked Chief if he thought he could pick up the totem pole at the entrance. He said he might've been able to as a younger man. (It's 1000 pounds—I confirmed with Ratched.)

I can't write right now. Constantine (Dr. Thacker—we're on a first-name basis) wants me to write a letter to Janice, in which I refer to her as "Mom" and explain as clearly as I can why I can't be around her, but why I might one day forgive her. I can't.

94

Three days before my scheduled release back into the human soup, Constantine[175] asks to accompany me to West Lawn because I "seem a little stuck."

I take him on the Savoy-brand Circuit of Tears. I don't cry more than twice while walking. He ambles beside me with his hands behind his back, acknowledging by name the people we see along the way, offering me soft pocket tissues.

When we get to West Lawn, I show him my sitting spot. He sweeps the dust away and sits down. No one else is around.

"So you come here a lot. To this exact spot?"

"Every day."

We see the birds. Hear the songs they tweet from the trees.[176]

Dr. Thacker remains an enigma. What someone like him, with his infinite calm and unshakeable patience, is doing wasting his time on a bonehead like me is a mystery. He could be walking on the moon right now. Leading the country. Building hospitals.

[175] His adoptive father wasn't Mr. C but a history professor, hence the cool first name.

[176] At one point, I tried to codify the language of the pudgy grey ones (no phone—haven't been able to look up their name), like that Ivy-League linguistics guy with the glasses who invented his own bird language on IG (I also haven't been able to look him up). But the birds kept mingling their songs, so the project had to be abandoned.

He dropped a slice of tuxedo cake outside my room yesterday. Chief thought it was a secret admirer. Nurse Ratched explained it was a leftover piece from a staff party, and that Dr. Thacker had set it aside specifically for me. To "assist with [my] recovery." The CC girls would've said he was trying to woo me to later molest me. They might've recommended I report him. Maybe the thread would've been funny...

What could I possibly offer him in return? Maybe a tour of the inside of West Lawn?

I ask if he's ever entered the building. He says no. But he's heard all sorts of stories about what used to take place here. Ghost stories, tales of espionage—chronicles about malpractice. He's not surprised I've been inside.[177]

"We broke in through the window out back. It's musty in there. Lots of graffiti. Russian decals on the walls. Spore creatures hiding in the dark. I think the building is alive. Breathing."

"It's not unusual for children or empathetic adults to anthropomorphize inanimate objects."

"I might as well be a kid. Everyone in my generation looks like overgrown kids, with that disorder where your body grows but your hormones don't catch up. I can't—"

"How do you feel about being called a kid? About still feeling like one?"

"I hate it. Because at this rate, I'll be a fuckin' Peter/Patricia Pan my whole life. You're either a Peter Griffin or a Peter Pan. Men used to be Peter Griffins."

He starts to chuckle, then catches himself. "Be honest with yourself. Don't revert to irony. It probably hurts to think you'll never grow up because your body's being held back in some way, because you missed the proverbial boat. Or if we're to use your metaphor, the proverbial *flight*. How's the letter to your mom coming along?"

"Not well. It's too much. There's too much to cover. What I told you was, like, two percent. Maybe less."

Constantine hums.

---

[177] I don't tell him about the sex on the top floor or anything—I said we did it at the cemetery. I don't want him to think I genuinely was a felon.

"There will be people in our lives who don't ever clue into what they do to us. Your mom may never apologize to you. Her habits may claim her before she gets a chance to. If you open up to her, you might be able to reclaim some of the agency she stole from you."

"Nothing comes out." Then I have an idea: "Could I do the Zoomer thing and record a voice note?"

"You have a distinct and ever-present need to set yourself apart from others your age, Savoy. An almost pathological contrarianism. We'll add that to the list of things to discuss, to go with your generalized distrust of 'normie' women, 'especially the uggo ones'; the 'Manbaby'—what did you call it? The opposite of the Madonna/Whore complex—"

"The Tannhäuser/Manbaby complex for men."

"Thank you. That, your love of political extremism, your biracial identity confusion, your 'I'-first focus, your fixation with fertility—"

"I think that's why I hate my mom most. My dad's one thing—he's too absent-minded to be evil—but my mom—"

"Why? For instilling in you a love for opera?"

"The lies, the selfishness, the dangerous situations where we'd have people rob the house when I was younger because she owed them money—I can forgive those. The one thing I can't bring myself to forgive her for—and I genuinely have tried this past week—is having three children and letting two of them go. If a mom like mine, a *literal crack whore*, the lowest of the low, the thing pre-teens use to represent the dredges of society—a woman who texts me memes of prostitutes from *Grand Theft Auto* thinking it's real life, saying 'this was made for me'—can shit out confused, drug-addicted-from-birth halfies like me with different fathers, without a care in the world, and not be *smited* by God, I don't think there's a fairness to any of this. Look at me. I may never be able to have even *one* child—*one*—that I'd surrender every part of myself for, until my final breath in this diseased world, love and cherish as best someone in my position could. And she can have all those? You're telling me that's fair?"

"Why do you think you can't have children? Have you had an ultrasound or hysteroscopy done? Why do you think you're infertile?"

"Do you see how hairy my arms are? The hair is all up my back, my butt. Everywhere. I'm surprised Avery didn't puke when he saw me naked."

"That doesn't mean you can't have kids."

"I have other symptoms. Higher amounts of muscle mass, terrible period cramping, a little paunch on my belly I can never get rid of, no matter how much I starve myself, which used to be a huge problem—so we can add 'history of anorexia' to the list, too. It's probably PCOS. Plus, there are some things doctors can't tell you about your body."

"PCOS is treatable. They can give you clomiphene, letrozole, gonadotropins." (Why? Why does he try to help?)

"How do you know so much about this?"

He shimmies and places his elbow upon his bent knee. The birds cheep some more. "This might be too much information, but Sage...she has similar fertility concerns. I think that's why she busies herself in her master's program, as an excuse to avoid trying to have children. She feels that if she has PCOS to the point of infertility, finding out after trying would be more devastating than waiting until we were outside the window or never trying and holding onto the thought that she could have had them if we'd only put more effort in."

"Yeah. I understand."

"I've spoken to her many times about her fear. There's a block there I—I can't get around. How's that for a bit of irony from me—I'm a psychiatrist who can't help his own wife."

"Maybe it's a communication thing. Maybe she needs to hear it from a new source. I could talk to her for you."

"Thanks for the offer, but how about we focus on helping you out before we get to me? Maybe when the time comes, I'll take you up on it."

"Yipee! I'm gonna make you a father—wait—I didn't mean it like that—"

"I know what you meant," he chuckles. "You have a lot of great qualities, like your warm smile and curious eyes, so I know you'll make a doting mother one day for the man you love. One with her own wild methods, I'm sure." Then he catches himself and his tone changes, as if he's violating some doctor-patient Hippocratic semen-oath thingy. "But I digress. If I may skip to my main point regarding your treatment: At the heart of the human conundrum is an issue of framing. I'm convinced that, excepting any relation to more serious physical or genetic conditions, all psychological problems stem from this. Carry with you too narrow a frame, and every choice you make will feel damning, overwhelming. Carry too wide a frame, and you lose perspective

on your own wants and needs and let those of others preoccupy and burden you. Yours is presently microscopic. You analyze every inch, every *pore* of yourself—without reprieve. This sadistic self-criticism will hurt you more and more with each passing day. The self can't hold up under such pressures."

"Okay, but I—"

"There it is again. Don't justify this framing. Don't explain it to me. Your defense mechanisms—and believe me, the inner child of yours, your buried sentimental self, who exists in direct opposition and intensity to your ego-protected self, has *many*—will kick in and seek to rationalize it. It'll enable you to feel as if all of your self-destructive reactions to the horrible things done to you over the years will have been warranted—or worse, necessary. Wanton self-criticism keeps you from agency, keeps you in a state of etherized passivity. As does the opposite, like with those 'Redditors' you claim are so concerned with social topics they lose their ability to live well. If you take anything away from our time together, let it be the capacity to acknowledge help and accept perspective. To simply say *yes* when the time is right. You'll broaden your scope enough to endure this life again. With time, you'll be able to love yourself authentically and without reservation. I promise."

"Framing? Is what I've been missing this whole time?"

"From what I can tell, yes. It's not a panacea—there might be other smaller things as well."

"Sit with it a while. And in the meantime, do your damned voice note," he chides. "We don't have all day."

"There's a Chinese tourist taking a panorama right there."

"I thought you didn't care what the average person thought of you? Didn't you end up here for that reason? I'm gonna add your beef with minorities to the list, too."

"That was different."

"I'm teasing you. Now begin. Give it your all. And be honest with her, Savoy."

"Okieee :)"

95

I'm released without totem-pole-throwing incident a couple days later.

A nurse tells me the hospital doesn't have the resources to support someone like me for longer than two weeks, who isn't an immediate threat to themselves. She gives me my last breakfast (a sausage disk, two pancakes, some berries, and a prefab croissant I recognize from Safeway).

I tidy my room and head down to eat in the mess hall with the others.

Everyone's chatty. Candy—Charlene—gives me her croissant because she doesn't like plain ones. I thank her, Michael, Barry, and a few of the others whom I'd taken real efforts to befriend, for keeping me company.

Our final activity together is stealing a boat, catching a couple fish, and getting the squad laid. (Kidding. It's working together to finish a puzzle. Life isn't old movies.)

I don't have a final session with Doctor Constantine, but before I return today's iteration of my lavender garb, which I've gotten more attached to than I care to admit, I ask Nurse Jane if I can go see him.

He isn't in his office. I deposit *The Elements of Style* and the pen he gave me by the door. I include note torn from my notebook and a few poems.

At the front, my phone, minor possessions, and clown outfit are returned to me. I have only six texts and one missed call. This time, I don't wear the nose. I thank the staff for taking such good care of me and everyone else.

I call an Uber. The prospect of taking the bus home from the asylum in a clown costume is too funny for even me. My driver, Rashmeet, will be here in four minutes. Might as well pick a bench and soak in some rays.

The sound of automatic slider doors opening cuts through the ray-soaking. "Ah—hey. There you are." Constantine says, winded. "Got your note. Glad I caught you."

"Thought you might have taken the day off."

"Maybe I should? It's like I live here."

"Hanging out with crazies all day is enough to make anyone go crazy themselves. Next, I'll be counselling you."

Rashmeet has stopped to smell the gas station roses. He's now seven minutes out.

Waiting for a ride?" he asks, and I show him the map of Rashmeet's progress. Constantine also asks if I have a place to stay, some money, non-clown clothes. Jokes that I can always sleep in the West Lawn building.

Rashmeet's on the go again and closing in rapidly, in the way Uber drivers do to keep you on your toes.

"I want you to have this." He holds out *The Elements of Style*. "You've gotten more use out of it in the last week and a half than I have in years. It's yours now. Keep writing."

Let's make it 100 read-throughs.

"While it's a shame we didn't get through the full list of your issues—and I do very much want to hear why you distrust Teflon pans so much—the psychiatrist in me is assured that you're on pace. I'm still young in my career, but I know a patient who'll recover when I see one. You've made me a better doc—"

"Do you have Instagram?" I blurt. "I was serious about speaking with your wife. I know that you would be a terrific father. I want that for you two. You can reach out to me on there. Here—I'll write it down." I hand him a scrap piece from the notebook with my handle on it.

"I normally can't accept the contact information of patients, but I think it'll be okay in this case. Your energy might be exactly what Sage needs."

A black Honda Accord comes in hauling ass, halting to a *skrrting* stop in front of the building. In the morning sun, it might as well be a chariot.

"There's your ride—and your *enthusiastic* driver. Okay, Savoy. Be well."

"Thank you—for saving me." (Was that cliché? So be it. Framing.) I don't know how to say goodbye, so I give him a platonic kiss on the cheek. The first I've ever given anyone.

"It was all you. Even when you lied to me about not sneaking out. The nurses see everything here." He places a hand on my shoulder. "Bon voyage. Stay funny. I mean that—as one former foster child to another."

He opens the door.

96

I was hauled from the comedy club in such a fervour that night, that I left my keys behind. Have to knock on the door to get Mr. Chang to let me in.

Dax isn't home. It's chilly. His room is empty. So's the pantry. The relatively few belongings he had in the common area—the broken, upside-down bike, the clarinet in its case, the giant Monster-brand *Halo* helmet—are gone. Looks like how it did when we moved in.

For our maiden week in this place, we unpacked nothing but the pots and pans, a couple personal items. Took turns making each other lunch and dinner. He wasn't a bad cook in those days—could throw together a mean chicken cacciatore. He insisted on using Vegeta seasoning because it reminded him of *Dragon Ball Z*. I'd done most of the heavy lifting by finding us a couch, setting up the WIFI, hanging his corkboard up. I'd wake him up so we could catch the same bus up to SFUBC. If it worked out, we'd take the same one home. We had fun those first months. The first year or two.

He did his best to clean his room before leaving. Stains are still visible on the floor near where the garbage bag was. Some milk residue on the ceiling The smell lingers. Did he get his deposit back? Or did he tell Mr. Chang I'd clean it? Knowing Mr. Chang, I'll have another roommate as of tomorrow, without notice. What kind of person would want in on this setup? A divorced businessman, a CC nona. Someone like Winston—Dad? That's what he had to do after leaving Janice—Mom. Start all over again with an unknown roommate.

When you're away from your own room for the wrong reasons, you have to reintroduce yourself to it when you return. It's the same as when you come home hungover, and the sun's passive-aggressively angry at you, while acting like its usual self. Your room welcomes you, but it wants a word.

Dax must have watered my plants, because most are still alive, including Veenie. He even fed her a worm snack. I pet Joe Rogan and apologize in the form of an unreserved collapse onto the bed. It's so quiet I could cry. No more spasmodic grunting. No more key-clicking. No more yawns so big they cause him to fall out of his gaming chair. No more "eiiughhhhs."

With little else to do, I pull out my phone and search up a written walkthrough for the last section, Episode 5, of *Life Is Strange*. I start

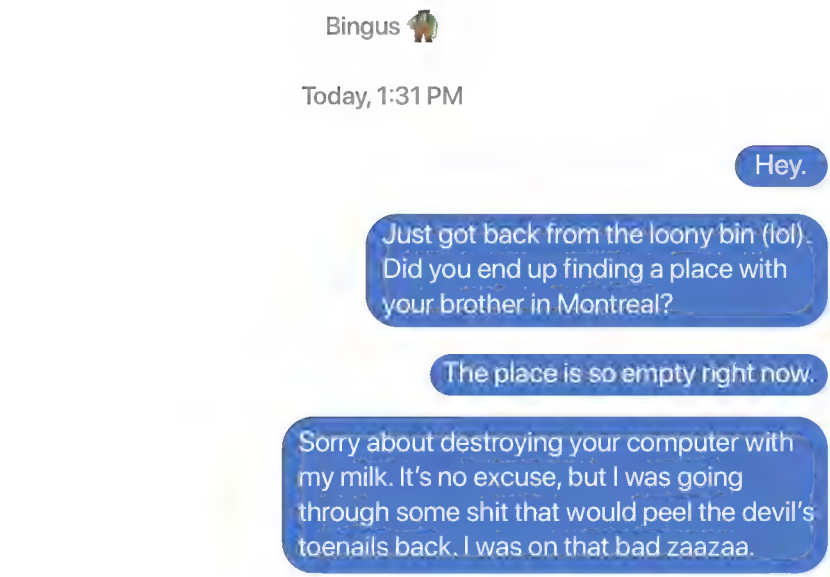
from after the events of the Vortex Club's party. We're kidnapped by Mr. Jefferson—it was the homeroom teacher all along—for getting too close to the truth behind the missing girls in town. The chapter is called "Polarized."

I scan through the summary of events, from the temporal superpower god mode tomfoolery, to stopping the big baddie with the help of Chloe's "step douche," to more timeline hopping, to kissing/rejecting Warren, the love interest, to finally making it back to your best friend, Chloe, as the town stands on the brink of destruction at the hands of a hurricane your powers have caused.

Here's the thing: All the shit you've done up to this point doesn't matter. The game has only these two endings: Sacrifice Chloe so that the town may be saved—this will satisfy Pacific Northwest indie Poseidon—or save Chloe and let the town be eviscerated. All of your other small choices, like saving Kate or letting her jump to her death, all the things you could have fretted about, change only the amount of people who show up to Chloe's funeral if you let her die, or who's inconvenienced by the storm if you save her.

If we'd done the worst run-through possible, torched our whole playthrough, it wouldn't have mattered. It would have been forgiven. It would have only ever come down to *friend* or *home*.

Dax left a singular cantaloupe in the fridge. I slice it up and don't bother to take the skin off before texting him a message:


Bingus
Today, 1:31 PM
Hey.
Just got back from the loony bin (lol). Did you end up finding a place with your brother in Montreal?
The place is so empty right now.
Sorry about destroying your computer with my milk. It's no excuse, but I was going through some shit that would peel the devil's toenails back. I was on that bad zaazaa.

No, put plainly, I was hurt.

Even if I was mad at you for the mistake with my slugs, that doesn't excuse what I did to you.

Did you ever finish "Life Is Strange"?

The ending comes down to saving Chloe or Arcadia Bay.

When I was reading the walkthrough, it hit me in the weirdest way:
You were my best friend.

You showed it in your own sense, but you were one of the only people in this city, this damned country, who accepted me for who I was.

I should have accepted you for who you were.

You can still do great things. You used to say that there wasn't time left for you. There is. We both have time left. You need to find what gets you there. You will.

Whether you end up in Montreal, playing video games all day, or stay in the city and finish up at SFUBC, I want you to know that I had fun living with you. You were my best friend. Fatman pants and everything. I'd choose you over a storm. Any day.

Please take care of yourself.

SigmaxSavoy, signing out.

P. S. Thanks for taking care of *me* after I tried to zoot myself

P. P. S. Could you please ask Avery to unblock me on IG? I have something important to tell him.

1: 51 PM

hey vro

glad ur doin better

●●●

[Bingus is typing]

97

After texting with Dax, I call Nana back. She updates me on the goings-on back home. She's a bit lonely. The seniors' centre is holding a dance next month. She's been invited, but she's not ready to be among people yet. The bills are all in her name now.

Pawpaw's funeral made the local news. They got footage of security removing Mom from the building and her screaming outside of it after I'd left. Nana and Mom have spoken once or twice since—nothing major. Mom was thinking of trying DMT to reset her brain wavelengths because she'd seen a reel about its capacity to heal childhood trauma. Still no job, but she's getting old enough to retire soon, what was the point in trying to get one now? Nana has enough money to keep her out of trouble. She wishes Mom would understand that Pawpaw was a kind, giving man who'd himself been abused as a youngin'. I ask her to try to understand Mom's perspective for once.

She clarifies I wasn't born addicted to anything. My half-brothers are in Detroit and Toronto. She gives me their birth names. Also gives me the birth name of my biological father.

Dad was thinking of running for Mayor of Edmonton. Kidding. He's loving life, *Young and the Restless*, and sponging off Mom, which means, in truth, sponging off Nana. So it goes.

She wishes I would visit again during non-funeral season. I suggest she come to me, just in case. And that she bring Wally.

♀

I send Mom the voicenote I made with Dr. Thacker, who has added me on IG, as of 3:04 PM. I tell her she doesn't have to listen to it right away, or ever.

She's read the messages. No response yet.

98

The old version of me would have donned a black overcoat, grabbed a beaten-up stereo, and sat outside Mr. Clemence's, hoping to attract his attention so she could apologize for speaking ill of his late wife and daughter.

This Savoy is different. Still retarded, but more patient. Less apprehensive, less compulsive.

There is no getting my job back. And I'm not sure I want it back. Let's just hope Maria and Raphael are happy together. And that Julia's happy, too.

As for Kath and Jerrod: I'm vacillating between flooding them with messages, mailing them a token gift card for roller skating, and buying them Flair tickets so they can watch *Burnt* on a claptrap plane and come stay with me for a while, like the good ol' days. Maybe at the same time as Nana and Wally.

99

Uhm, bye, Felicia/Sweaty/Love You
Anonymous 2 hours 289912
>>289914 >>289915 >>289917 >>289927
>>289928 >>289931 >>289938 >>289942
>>289943 >>289948 >>289951 >>289953
>>289955 >>289961 >>289964 >>289973
>>289975 >>289980 >>289981 >>289983
>>289984 >>289985 >>289991 >>289995
>>290001 >>290005 >>290009 >>290011

I first migrated here a few years ago from 4chan after originally migrating there from Tumblr. I've passed through so many phases of internet culture that I've lost count. I've been around for the silly campaigns, the leaks, the births of so many of the broader meme culture's biggest hits. In a way I can't yet describe, this place has been the most helpful. I've gotten to know a lot of you women over the years. Some of you I've carried on real conversations with on other platforms. This site is filled with talented, pragmatic girls whom I wish saw their own charm and potential. I made the mistake of posting about my ex-boyfriend's art on here. I made several mistakes posting about him prior to that. It's on me that you doxxed him and tried to ruin his life. I've accepted the blame. I don't blame

you. I would have done the same if this had been a year ago—maybe even a few months ago. The fallout of everything almost got me, almost did me bad. It took chance and luck for me to stay alive. And then I had way too much time on my hands to think about this place.

1/2

Anonymous 2 hours 289914 >>289969 >>289979 >>289990 >>290004

>>289912 (You)
2/2 This is only the mid-level of the cave. Get out. If there's any way out, take it. I know you can. I believe in you. I do. This is my goodbye—to all of you. To the ones who kept me company when my life had no meaning at all. Thanks for the entertainment, the rants, the memes, the shit-disturbing. Much of what I've learned about men, women, and the world has come from this place. I'll never be the girl I was before I came on here. There's no going back. I don't *want* to go back.

Once you make it out—which I know most of you can—come find me. I'll be waiting with ambrosia and some whitepills. We can do that trill baddie shit irl. Be well, nonas. I love you all.

Anonymous 2 hours 289915 >>289929 >>289949

>>289912 (You)
Thanks for the blogpost. I'm glad he left you. Would doxx again.

Anonymous 2 hours 289917 >>289935

>>289912 (You)
You can't tell me this isn't a moid in disguise. Get the FUCK out.

Anonymous 2 hours 289920 >>289977

Rope at your next convenience.

Anonymous 2 hours 289921 >>289958 >>289976 >>289998 >>290002

The high and mighty one leaves her final mocking missive for all us peons to read! How fun. Look, you delusion twat, it's as they say: You're here forever. You may think now that you've "found yourself" you're somehow going to turn it all around and everything's gonna be sunshine and daisies and Cinderella fantasies. It's not. You're fucked. Nature rolled the dice on us, and we all got snake eyes. I am not normal. You are not normal. None of us are normal. The sooner you get that through your thick fucking skull, the sooner you come to terms with reality. You are here forever. You will be back. Eat shit. See you in a week, bitch.

Anonymous 2 hours 289927

100

The Girl in the House on the Street Named After an Apple

A little after dinnertime, I knock for a second time on Mr. Chang's front door and ask for permission to use the backyard—to draw my ongoing voodoo ritual to a close. He grants it with mild skepticism.

Amazingly, the cross and grave are still there. The grave is tilted ever so slightly, having taken on the elements. I right it.

I come wearing not my complete clown costume—only the nose. They would have liked that. I offer a piece of cantaloupe and wedge it into the topsoil. They would have liked that, too. I dig a small hole with my fingers and insert an empty prescription bottle. They would have loved that. I consider burying my nose with them. They wouldn't have liked that. I ask them how they're getting along in slug heaven. Have they seen Pawpaw there? They don't answer, but I think I know what they'd say.

The cherry trees have lost their foliage. They're down to the ovaries. The sunset is about to begin. The sky is a shocking magenta—magnetic and omnipotent. The clouds, postured and plumed, wet themselves with the purples, then drink deep, banking into one another with delicate, seen-it-all *noblesse oblige*. At the sparrows' call, the clouds stagger in benevolent chorus, kindly process, making way for the sun's departure, the land's rest, something else's arrival.

Under the brilliance of the heavens above, I write a poem.[178]

[178] *[see poem on next page]*

cherry blossoms

what was the word you used for when the cherry blossoms look all
abscission triumphant
and loose ready to give themselves up
like that
if i were a little more deliberate i'd say they're us
what if
they just didn't do
"the damned thing"
and stayed instead up there
clinging
to the branch like what's forcing them other
to fall
than a collective or something
psychosis
i don't know
you
know what i'm saying you
don't
how much of it is
belief
how much of it is &
predetermined
how much of it is
just
going with the the flow they say
flow
they hate they they abuse they suspect
grieve perceive
they lose themselves to a frenzy of
whirls
because they want to be
be
i used to want to want to
them
hold on to the seasons
spite
but i see that this their way
is
it must be
the dial always turns
over
over
so what
if we them
imagined
more than just
happy?

I monk-clap and bow to the grave—and take a picture to replace my lock screen. Avery stays my background.

Framing. Flow. Beyond the microscopic...

I pull up Instagram:

Avery Bazin

Today, 7:12 PM

I hope you're well, Avery. It's Savoy again.

You may not wish to hear from me right now: what, with how I badgered you with messages for weeks. It's not something I'm proud of—and if I could go back and replay the situation, I would doubtless try to handle it with more maturity, self-awareness, and respect for you.

I had to go away for a little while to start to understand my worse tendencies. It was a long time coming, and was a painful process. If you haven't heard the full story from Dax, then I'll tell you sometime. If you have, then I'm sure I look even worse now. Not that you really can look worse than how the nonas made me look with their accusations, or with how badly I messed up by sharing my "courting" attempts online, or with my history of participating in doxxings in the past, but you know what I mean. This would be what they call karma.

Weird. Deranged. At times, snide—I'm all of these. I care too much. I take chances. I feel in ways that unsettles most people. But that's also not who I have to be forever. Much of me will stay; some of the worse parts will be replaced with better ones. More stable ones. Ones that people will like.

You were a reminder that love is possible amid dystopia; you were a reminder that principles matter more than money or attention; you were a reminder that I'm a woman—one whose life she had never properly examined or enjoyed the way it was meant to be.

Thank you for that.

We spoke of what comes next for the zeitgeist, what could follow from *this.* I'm no philosopher. I'm catching up with my studies in my own way. But if the last few weeks have taught me anything, it's that it's not one thing that will follow for the society or the individual. It's many.

It's everything wrapped up in one now that we've opened Pandora's experiential box.

You can't revert to a stock sincerity after seeing what we've seen. Short of using nukes, there's no reset button for humanity. We'll never wholly regain our innocence, or let go of our resentment, or hold back a cheap laugh or stinging dig, stop feeling that life, at times, has no organization or weight behind it at all. Yet if we can temper those feelings with the faith that there's an underlying kindness, a real, immutable care, behind our intentions—
—and maybe get rid of the bad eggs who don't want that for humanity 😉—we might arrive at an ethos for a world that could so easily antagonize its way into an early death otherwise.

It'll be an honest, unhurried bliss. It'll feel like laughter. More than that. A knowing laugh, a pat on the back, and a sustained hug, before we begin our shared project anew.

And even if no one else goes in for this, I'm gonna try it.

What should we call it. Metamodern after-resentment? A work in progress.

Writing has been therapeutic. I just wrote a poem about this very topic. I'm still not as good as you, but I'm having a hell of a time getting better. They might let me dispute my re-admission to SFUBC. I think there's a chance. If not, I know I'll find new path. Maybe with this and drawing —real drawing—again.

If you don't want to speak to me again, you are well within your rights not to. Know that what I said before was true: I did not bad-mouth you online. I never would. If anything, I bragged.

Those thread links I sent over before should remain active. They might be a start when it comes to building my case. We might be able to use them to get you your job back. Aman's very understanding.

Either way, you deserve a partner who values you, one whom you can trust. I wasn't that.

But I'll "shoot my shot" while I have you. I can be that for you. Actions—those are what count. I'm growing; I'm learning. I might soon be able to teach you something every now and again and not feel like such a dead weight!

If you will have me one day, once more.

I'll be waiting.

Thank you, Papi. Onii-chan. Avery Bazin.

Yours—eternally,
and then more.
Savoy

The buds of the cherry trees will lie dormant on the ovaries for 11 months, until they re-emerge, developing pistils, stamins, and everything else that makes them beautiful and alive.

Sent.

And then I woke up. It was just a dream.[179]

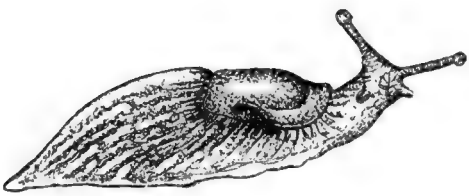
No, but seriously—what actually happened:

He responded.

(😉😜)

[179] Could you imagine?

FIN~~* 😊



Afterword

When River Page of *The Free Press* approached me about doing a full-length feature on another project of mine, the controversial *Echolalia Review: An Anti-Poetry Collection* (*Pere Ube*, 2025), I was ecstatic. While I'd had some success as a writer prior to my experiment, making my way into just over 100 literary magazines, editing for a literary journal, and releasing a couple indie books for good measure, I hadn't yet broken through onto the bigger cultural scene in a meaningful capacity. One of my pen names, Jasper Ceylon, had been receiving decent media attention for perpetrating my Ern Malley-esque poetry hoax and had undoubtedly rustled some of the more delicate feathers out there, but as far as the "Aaron Barry" behind it all went—well, he was twiddling his thumbs somewhere, semi-retired, it seemed, after three years of relative inactivity —or off cranking his hogg, as Savoy might put it. So when the chance came along to reconcile my various literary identities, the ones I'd been writing under for the preceding three years, including the original persona behind this book, S.A.B. Marcie, I jumped at the chance. However, this is where things got complicated (and lawsuit-y).

First, though, some context about this book, specifically:

Femoid is based on real experiences. Experiences of mine, as well as those of an ex-girlfriend, who served as the inspiration for Savoy. If I had to give you a percentage as to how many of the things in this novel actually happened in some form—from the art gallery visits to the fatalistic inlet trips—I'd say 90%. (My ex hasn't yet been committed to a new-age mental institution for performing an outrageous comedy set at the old club we used to frequent.) I had—and continue to have—full permission from my ex's end to fictionalize elements of her life story, and I would like to think that Savoy is a more diabolical and dialed-up version of her, an intensified conduit for how she thought, felt, acted, and dreamed. Shortly after I'd started writing this book, we both got the sense that its contents would be so intense and polarizing that I'd have to assume yet another pen name in order to get this project past the potentially sensitive or preachy editors I'd proven with my *Echo* project were running the show in publishing. It became similarly apparent that this persona would have to

match the main character's with a decent degree of fidelity to be given the all-good in an industry milieu still huffing the dizzying fumes of the *#OwnVoices* movement. Thus, because this was in so many ways our story, I merged our names together and created the persona who would be responsible for pitching this to publishers: S.A.B. Marcie.

It didn't take long for Marcie, the mixed-race (reformed) femoid, to find a publisher. In fact, it all worked out a lot more expeditiously than expected. I'd been on the hunt for a publisher who championed offbeat, challenging works, and who didn't appear to be as concerned with identity or politics, so when "B"xxxx Xxxxx of Cxxxxxx Axxxxxx expressed an interest in picking up the manuscript, I happily accepted.

Here was a press with an extensive history of publishing excellent books by excellent writers (writers who'd hit the very highest levels in the international publishing macrocosm, garnering Nobel Prize in Literature nominations, no less)—and this press even appeared to favour anonymity and freedom of artistic expression, according to their mission statement. More to the point, they purported to believe so strongly in those fundamental principles that their website featured entire entries and related blogposts about it. And they were willing to take on the project without having me sign any formal contract—per their policies. I was, according to the stated conditions, free to walk away from them at any time in the process, and if I did so, for whatever reason, I would retain all the rights to my work, no matter what. (One of several possible direct quotes on this, converted from the press' "special" cadence: "Cxxxxxxx has no interest in rights, only art and writer's rites [*sic*], bringing an artist's work into fruition. We don't comply with copywrong law, nor do we think that the publisher should have any rights over a book or piece of art, not even one-time rights. The artist that makes the art should always be the keeper of all rights, to do whatever they want with it.")

Did "B" ask me once who I was after he'd accepted *Femoid*? Yes. Did I tell him when I had the chance? No. That's on me. Call what I did lying, lying by omission—whatever you like. I'll fess up to it. But he was happy to proceed without verifying my identity. My rationale in not telling him was that, if his press openly advocated for "posthumanistic + anon/ pseudonymous works" and emphasized artistic freedom, was there any point in jeopardizing the (non-)deal, just in case "B" was somehow

unusually wary of white writers? And if the BIPOC person who inspired the book was actively aware of its existence, was involved in shaping its contents through spoken commentary, would it really matter if it was me holding the pen and not her? While my other pen names, such as Adele Nwankwo and b. h. fein, were tools in a ruse, the Marcie pen name was something of genuine meaning, and was to be tied in a serious way to a serious work. So, ultimately, when "B" said he didn't need to know who I was, how could I say no to proceeding?

I spent months editing *Femoid* after finishing the initial draft. Taking it down from 150,000 words to the present 98,000. I can't tell you how many editorial passes were involved, how many nights I spent at my writing desk, chewing on Haribo gummy bears and pulling my hair out over every minor detail in the (overly) complex web that *Femoid* is at its heart. (If you don't think editing a book all about an ex you still love but can't be with and to whom you promised, out of gratitude for all that she did for you, the money made off your book so she could get necessary treatment isn't a unique, Dantean form of agony, then you've got the kind of resolve I don't.) And, to his credit, "B's" eye for paring down additional parts of the manuscript was greatly appreciated when it came time to really nail this down. Not only that, but his design contributions (since removed) added in places a fun spark I knew would delight readers. (I still very much respect "B," despite the things he's said about me openly and behind the scenes. His misconceptions about Marcie and me remain, but once upon a time, he was nice to Marcie.) We had our arguments along the way, but there appeared to be a mutual understanding that the extra consideration being given to my book was going to aid in defining it as a potentially generational statement. (Keep in mind, I started writing this in 2023, a while before the release of femoid/femcel-style books of this particular Zoomer nature, like Honor Levy's *My First Book* or Sophie Kemp's *Paradise Logic*.) And something of a generational statement, it turned out to be—just in ways I hadn't expected.

Prior to the May, 2025, publication, "B" flexed his connections and hooked Marcie up with some big names and a few of their endorsements. Cxxxxx Bxxxxxx loaned her praise to it. Xxxxxxx Xxxxx followed suit, calling the book something akin to a masterpiece (later rescinded when he sent me a mean email and threatened to sue me!), and offered to set me up with his agent and

some big-time writer friends as a part of Xxxxx Xxxxxx Xxxxxxx's Nxx Wxxx: Xxxxxxxx exhibition series. "B" was talking about recommending me for a Giancarlo DiTrapano Foundation residency in Italy, where so many huge names have had the honour of refining their work. Hell, Oxxxxxx Mxxxxxxx, queen of the preceding generation of disaffected female writers, and her husband, writer and filmmaker Lxxx Gxxxxx, requested a physical, and Gxxxxx went so far as to meet with "B" in New York about potentially turning *Femoid* into some form of show or movie. I almost couldn't believe it. (A huge long-shot, mind you.) But there was one problem: How was I going to do any promotion, let alone readings or set appearances, if I was a white guy writing as a black girl?

All too often, good books die on the vine. (No matter how important their messages may be.) Nearly as many, though, die on the shelf. You can have endorsements and further deals in the works, but it's never certain if or when those will pan out, and a writer can spend months—if not, years—of their life waiting for things to fall into place. The thought of having *Femoid* collect virtual dust online was a perilous one, but my hands were tied on doing my own promotion. "B's" philosophy was to eschew promotion altogether, in favour of focusing on producing great books—which I can respect—so he wasn't going to be of much assistance on the day-to-day front. But more than anything, I felt that his stellar catalogue of titles deserved real attention from the public. Here was a press churning out absolute bangers—some of which sold in only the single-digit amounts, per his self-reported metrics. (He sent me a few in the mail. Even his own books were quite compelling.) This seemed like a tragedy of the highest order. This, then, brings us back to *The Free Press*.

If I was going to potentially get some major coverage, why not feature *Femoid* and Cxxxxxxx Axxxxxx's catalogue at the same time? It seemed like a win-win. ("All press is good press"; "A bird in the hand...," etc.) I was willing to take the risk of unveiling my true identity—and fucking up my second novel deal with *McBussy Publishing*, too—if it meant the other writers in "B's" stable would get some shine, and if "B" himself would get some praise for being such an instructive editor and, at times, industry mentor to me/Marcie. But before anything hit the stands, I knew I had to clear things with "B" first so there wouldn't be any surprises—at least give him the option of having nothing about *Femoid* or the press mentioned.

Turns out even the imprints and presses that pride themselves on freedom of expression, with mottos such as "to publish should mean to set free, not restrict" will (for ongoing legal implications, allegedly), if you confess to them you're not a mulatto foid and are, rather, someone who dated one and cared enough about her to immortalize her story, treat you like so: You'll (allegedly) be called an scumbag and (allegedly) be threatened with a lawsuit, *despite having signed no binding contractual agreement of any kind.* (If every editor who worked on books threatened to sue the authors over any editorial contributions offered to it, no author would ever be able to leave a press, and editors would become part-authors of everything they touched, no matter how much or little. How would that make any sense for the industry?) You might also (allegedly) have your politics questioned (your only semi-ironic answer of being an informed/fourth-dimensional centrist will go ignored, and you'll be accused of being a part of the then-already-dead Dimes Square movement), have your character (allegedly) questioned (you will be called even more names), *despite not even mentioning anything about your Jasper stuff or other books because you couldn't even get that far in the conversation*; (allegedly) you'll be chastised for being a white writer (you will be told that the press would not have published you, even if you *had* made it known you were working in collaboration with a BIPOC creative, because of issues the press had had with one singular white writer over the course of its 20+-year history), and, finally, you might have (again, allegedly) your now-former publisher delete all the files in front of you in the hopes of killing your book permanently.

Somewhat hilariously, my attempts at garnering attention for the book we'd slaved away over—and its press—ended miserably. *Femoid* was instantly de-listed (my pending royalties absorbed by the press—I guess?), the finished book itself was in an unpublishable state, and I began receiving strongly-worded emails pertaining to the situation almost immediately from those involved. (Though, to be fair, I think every writer should receive at least one threatening email from a publisher at some point in their career—something with real venom, calling them "a complete fraud," or vowing to make sure every other publisher they try to work with is aware of their grand "deception" or something. Who knows!) What's more, the press I had put out my *Echo* project with, who still supported the vision, and for whom I was supposed to become the editor-in-chief and primary poetry manuscript

editor, saw the fiasco surrounding me brewing and promptly wiped itself off the face of the earth to protect the identities of others involved. (Understandable.) In essence, I lost two publishers that day. (Nearly three. Thanks for being cool, Max. You, too, Reyes.)

Am I glad I outed myself? Absolutely. Every writer who invents sobriquets for themselves is inevitably presented with a chance to symbolically return to themselves once the job is done. Some get many; some get only one. The *Free Press* article felt like my moment. It merely sped up a plan I'd already set in place, and it helped rid me of the burden of watching my novel potentially languish indefinitely. And, if anything, my admission further proved the dangers of aligning oneself with ideologues and would-be tyrants in this industry. No writer should have thousands of hours of their time—their *literal life experiences*—held over them in any capacity, legal or otherwise, in the event of a publishing dispute. Sadly, too many who make their living this way have found themselves in these uncomfortable situations before—earning weak royalties, surrendering their copyrights, being forced to wait years for their words to see the proverbial light of day. Publishing has many great figures in it doing fantastic work, but it also has just as many snakes who would try to ruin your career if you did anything to upset them.

So here we are. *Femoid* is back. And I've reproduced everything (sans some of the artwork) as faithfully to the original as conceivably possible. Does the book become just a touch more satirical or less authentic when framed as one of mine? Tough to say. It's not for me to decide if the writer's identity re-frames a book inalienably, or in a way that's deemed a "deal-breaker." But know that, more than anything, I wrote this book exactly the way I did, rawness and all, because I knew my ex-girlfriend deserved to have her story told candidly and unreservedly—and that if even one person learned that you can live the kind of life she did—that *we* did—and make it out the other side, undergo that existential shift from sickly, all-consuming irony and resentment to an informed state of *thereafter* (call it "meta-modern after-resentment" like Savoy—call it anything you like—but it's waiting for those in our generation who're willing to heal and overcome)—whatever it took to get this out into the world would have been worth it and then some. At the end of the day, this novel was meant to help those drowning in their own illnesses.

I believe in freedom of artistic expression as much as I believe in this book, as flawed as a first novels tend to be. I would go so far as to stake my life and my career upon it. And shit—looks like I already have. I can fully accept someone not wanting their press associated with a ruse, even if the work they put out by the same author was genuinely unrelated and meant to be taken seriously. I'm not innocent in this, and I won't pretend to be some helpless victim. But there are reasonable ways to dissolve a publishing partnership, and then there are petty and vindictive ones. (Under other circumstances, I would have simply taken the chewing-out and moved on.) It's just unfortunate that things had to come this, where an article that was partly meant to celebrate a press became one that called it out for hypocrisy. (I reiterate: I still, in a weird way, respect "B's" *pre-me* legacy, as well as the press and those affiliated with it. I wish them no ill-will whatsoever. I simply would have appreciated at least the opportunity to explain my side of things. And even after all this, I'm still open to hashing things out—though, my previous offer to do so went ignored.) However, if I may offer one final address to the other "B's" of the world, who would fashion themselves the arbiters of literary taste and culture; who would denigrate and blacklist artists they disagree with, and who *would stand in the way of fiction actually constituted from the "blood" they so desperately wish in their website manifestos for art to be crafted from, but who get squeamish at the sight of anything red*: Kindly fuck off.

(Or else, see you in court, I guess!)

And to you, reader: I hope you enjoyed the wild ride that is *Femoid*. I made this digital version free because, like "B's" publishing manifesto quotes, "Piracy is preservation. If you love something, bootleg it." And I love this book. So I've (allegedly) bootlegged it for you. Share it all you want. :)

Aaron Barry
Vancouver, Canada
October, 2025

Aaron Barry, *aka* Jasper Ceylon, *aka* S.A.B. Marcie, *aka et al.* swears he's a nice guy—you gotta believe him! He's the author of *Echolalia Review: An Anti-Poetry Collection* (*Pere Ube*, 2025), *eggplants & teardrops: a haiku collection* (*ind. p.*, 2023), and the *Prompts Gone Wild* series, as well as *£, flesh* with *McBussy Publishing* (Summer, 2025). He currently lives in the Arc'teryx-coded hellscape[180] of Vancouver, Canada, but intends to buy one of those cheap Italian homes IG keeps recommending to him so that he can found an animal shelter abroad.

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[180] Okay, it's not that bad! ☺️

And whether you loved or hated the book, consider dropping a review on Goodreads. I love reading those.

"I'm just a girl."

Jaded, "maidenless," hyper-sensitive. Savoy Matviyenko is a biracial femoid at odds with the world. Not a female incel, or a normie "feeeemale," but someone caught in the murky interstices between the two. When she isn't doom-scrolling the dark recesses of the deep web, drawing digital porn for sicko clients, grinding away at a dead-end job, or lurking in dingy comedy clubs with her slovenly roommate, Dax, she fancies herself a future botanist, a would-be comedian or poet, a present-day edgelord who's totally not like other girls. Once Savoy starts "courting" (stalking) Avery Bazin, a burgeoning sculptor with a penchant for Cioran, her underlying psychological imbalances tip her towards instability. Her delusional notions of romance—spurred on by her tumultuous upbringing and neurotic idealism—steer her into a crash course of self-reconciliation.

Can a hopelessly romantic femoid keep it together long enough to find love in today's caustic, chronically online culture? Or is an ADHD-riddled "BPD baddie" like Savoy destined to be forever alone with her pet slugs (ಥ_ಥ)? After an unhinged stand-up debut that almost lands her in the can, and some (kwazy) time spent on the brink of suicidal collapse, Savoy must overcome the loathing of her era and find her way back to Earth.

(cover by Donovan Reyes)